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JUNE 17, 2009 • $4.95

WHY THEY REALLY HATE GAY MARRIAGE
JONATHAN CHAIT

WOODWARD *vs.* THE WHITE HOUSE
GABRIEL SHERMAN

NEWSMAG MAKEOVERS!
MICHAEL KINSLEY

KGB SPIES *in* AMERICA
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The Consequences *of* Arianna Huffington
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Plus
THE WORST PAINTER *of the* 20th CENTURY
JED PERL

MICHAEL B. OREN *on* REMEMBERING WORLD WAR I

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

A Journal of Politics and the Arts

VOLUME 240 WASHINGTON, JUNE 17, 2009 NUMBER 4,861

Justice Served

In the long history of the Supreme Court, biography is hardly destiny. The Court's chambers have been occupied by justices who have emerged from hardscrabble pasts yet possessed stunningly little empathy for those still mired in impoverished conditions. Clarence Thomas, to name the most obvious example, may have come from crushing poverty in Pin Point, Georgia, and triumphed over the longest odds—but that experience laid the basis for a body of work marked by bitterness, anger, and ideological rigidity.

When President Obama began considering David Souter's replacement, he spoke about the need for a justice who has "a sense of what real-world folks are going through." This never struck us as a very salient qualification for the job—or rather, not nearly as salient as, say, intellect or judicial philosophy. After all, Obama's standard would have led him to pick Thomas over Souter, a hermit who prefers spending his life buried in history books.

But Sonia Sotomayor, the judge Obama ultimately selected to fill Souter's chair, has an up-from-the-Bronx story that is very inspiring and, we hope, relevant. The Roberts Court has tilted so heavily in favor of business that a healthy dose of empathy for the powerless (not to mention sympathy for regulation and antitrust laws) would be a very good thing, indeed.

To state what should be beyond dispute: Sonia Sotomayor is qualified for this job and should be confirmed. Her opinions may be unflashy and technocratic, but the variety of her experiences—as a trial judge, appellate judge, and commercial litigator—seems to have endowed her with a sense of both the power and limits of the courts. Like David Souter, she appears to be a moderate liberal, which essentially means that she will preserve the Court's ideological status quo. And we hope that she evinces the same sort of growth that marked Souter's tenure.

When Barack Obama discussed his calculus for selecting a Supreme Court justice over the course of the campaign, he raised expectations that he would appoint a justice who might transform the Court. Earl Warren, he intimated, would be the platonic ideal that he would seek to replicate. There was a hope that he might fill what Cass Sunstein has called the "absence of anything like a heroic vision on the Court's left."

Despite Sotomayor's merits, there's little reason to believe she will be that kind of justice. There's also no evidence that she has great interest (or acumen) in intramural politicking of the sort that might nudge Anthony Kennedy toward the liberals and away from the conservatives. (While many have testified to her interpersonal skills, some lawyers who have argued before her have also raised questions about her temperament, as Jeffrey Rosen has reported.) Nor does she seem to have any interest in becoming a liberal answer to Antonin Scalia. As a judge, she has steered clear of staking out bold stances on social issues. And her record has few traces of economic populism—although one can locate some encouraging signs in scattered rulings—a fact that helps explain why the Chamber of Commerce has failed thus far to join the conservative base in rallying against her.

The president's political rationale for the pick is clear enough. There's not much in the Sotomayor record that will likely generate heated opposition—and lead to the kind of bruising confirmation battle that would siphon political capital from the coming legislative fights over health care reform and cap and trade. As conservatives began to make the case against her this past week, their opposition, for the most part, was recited with little feeling and dampened by their sense of futility. What's more, to point out the obvious, Sotomayor is a symbolically potent pick that could further cement the increasingly firm place of Latinos within the Democratic coalition.

Supreme Court nominations have turned into such intense partisan scrums that they have distracted and derailed important conversations about the qualifications, intellectual style, and temperament that yield the most effective justices. Barack Obama will likely have other opportunities to put his mark on the Court. And we hope that, in the aftermath of Sotomayor's confirmation, liberals can engage in a robust debate about what they would like to see from Obama in his next turn at the plate. Conservatives transformed the federal courts by appointing the most determined and able conservative intellectuals in the country. Liberals who want to take back the courts can't afford anything less. ◆

Edel Rodriguez

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Miss Guided

Carrie Prejean and other anti-gay-marriage intellectuals.

JONATHAN CHAIT

BEAUTY PAGEANT contestant Carrie Prejean, asked about gay marriage a few weeks ago, summed up her view this way: "In my country and in my family, I think that I believe that marriage should be between a man and a woman." It's a pretty simple answer—what you'd expect, intellectually, from someone who had just successfully completed a bikini walk rather than a dissertation on the topic at hand.

Around the same time, Rudy Giuliani framed his own thinking in similar terms: "Marriage, I believe, both traditionally and legally, has always been between a man and a woman and should remain between a man and woman." (In Giuliani's case, he means a man and one woman at a time, though some romantic overlap may be unavoidable.)

Gay-marriage opponents have made that formulation their mantra. It's a really strange way for them to summarize their argument, because it's not an argument at all. If we're debating health care, one side will have a line about big government, and the other will have a line about the uninsured or spiraling costs. If we're debating torture, advocates will mention the need to make terrorists talk, and opponents will invoke American values. Soundbites, by their nature, can't express much logical nuance, but they do tend to give you a reason to agree with the position.

The anti-gay-marriage soundbite, by contrast, makes no attempt at persuasion. It's like saying you oppose the Bush tax cuts because "I believe the top tax rate should be 39.6 percent." You believe that marriage should be between a man and a woman? OK! But why?

The ubiquity of this hollow formulation tells us something about the state of anti-gay-marriage thought. It's a body of opinion held largely by people who either don't know why they oppose gay marriage or don't feel comfortable explicating their case.

In a liberal society, consenting adults are presumed to be able to do as they like, and it is incumbent upon opponents of any such freedom to demonstrate some wider harm. The National Organization for Marriage, on its website, instructs its activists to answer the who-gets-harmed query like so: "Who gets harmed? The people of this state who lose our right to define marriage as the union of husband and wife, that's who." Former GOP Senator Rick Santorum, arguing along similar lines, has said, "[I]f anybody can get married for any reason, then it loses its special place."

TRB
From Washington

Both of these arguments rest upon simple tautologies. Expanding a right to a new group deprives the rest of us of our right to deny that right to others. If making a right less exclusive devalues it, then any extension of rights is an imposition upon those who were not previously excluded—i.e., women's suffrage makes voting less special for men.

Another objection holds that gay marriage would weaken the link between marriage and child-rearing, therefore encouraging out-of-wedlock births. If true, this would at least provide some weight on the scale against gay marriage. But it suffers from two massive flaws. First, it's hard to imagine how the tiny gay minority's behavior can materially influence the way the vast majority of heterosexuals view marriage. Second, if you think about it, the causality gay-marriage opponents imagine is running the wrong way. Suppose we had a social epidemic of young adults who moved back into their parents' houses and watched television all day rather than finding a job. You might want to strengthen the link between adulthood and work. You'd be concerned about anything that weakened this link by letting adults not work—say, early retirement. But you *wouldn't* be concerned about the social signals sent by teenagers finding summer jobs. That would be weakening the link between adulthood and work, but not in the harmful way.

Likewise, marriage proponents might worry about anything that expands childbearing to the non-married, but they have no reason to fear expanding marriage to the non-childbearing. This is why approximately zero people in the history of the human race have ever expressed concern about allowing old or otherwise infertile heterosexuals to marry, even though they account for a far larger percentage of marriages than gays ever could.

The most striking thing about anti-gay-marriage arguments is that they dwell exclusively on how heterosexuals would be affected. Heather Mac Donald of the conservative Manhattan Institute writes, "I fear that it will be harder than usual to persuade black men of the obligation to marry the mother of their children if the inevitable media saturation coverage associates marriage with homosexuals."

I suppose you could imagine, somewhere, a black man telling his friends he's going to propose to his pregnant girlfriend, only to be taunted, "Marriage? That's so *gay*," and think better of it. I don't find this very likely. Neither does Mac Donald, actually. "[I]f someone can persuade me that the chances are zero, then I would be much more sanguine," she writes. "But anything more than zero, I am reluctant to risk."

This is the One Percent Doctrine of social policy. If you place zero weight upon the preferences of gays, then all you have to do is suggest a *possible* harm, however remote, associated with gay marriage. The same sensibility was on stark display in a recent *National Review* editorial. Dismissing the argument that marriage might foster more stable gay relationships, the magazine's editors replied curtly, "[T]hese do not strike us as important governmental goals." There's a word for social policy that disregards the welfare of one class of citizens: discrimination.

Some hard-core conservatives are willing to discriminate openly like this, but most people aren't, which is why public opinion is warming to gay marriage. Most opposition arises from simple discomfort. When I first started hearing about gay marriage. I didn't *oppose* it, but it seemed sort of strange and radical—and only after several years did I realize I supported it.

The line "I believe that marriage should be between a man and a woman" is an expression of that sensibility—a reflection of unease rather than principle. As people face up to the fact that opposing gay marriage means disregarding the happiness of the people most directly (or even solely) affected by it, most of us come around. Good ideas don't always defeat bad ideas, but they usually, over time, defeat non-ideas. ◆

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Contents

June 17, 2009

The Editors	1	**JUSTICE SERVED** *Judging Obama's first Supreme Court pick.*
		TRB
Jonathan Chait	2	**MISS GUIDED** *Carrie Prejean and other anti-gay-marriage intellectuals.*
		THE MALL
Michael Kinsley	5	*Blah blah newsmag remake blah blah.*
Gabriel Sherman	7	*Bob Woodward versus the White House.*
Michael Crowley	9	*The poor schmo who has to move all the Gitmo detainees.*
James Verini	10	*Meet the Sandinista who runs the United Nations.*
Jed Perl	12	*What the torture photos can't tell us.*
		FEATURES
Michael B. Oren	14	**FLEEING MOMENT** *A cultural history of desertion.*
Bradford Plumer	16	**POWER STRUGGLE** *Do we need a technological breakthrough to avert the climate crisis?*
Amitai Etzioni	20	**SPENT** *America after consumerism.*
		BOOKS AND THE ARTS
Stanley Kauffmann	24	**FILMS CHANGES** *Assayas makes a worn theme fresh; post-camera historiography.*
Jed Perl	25	**ART SLAUGHTERHOUSE** *The competition is tough, but Francis Bacon may have been the worst painter of the twentieth century.*
Isaac Chotiner	29	**BOOKS THE PUFFINGTON HOST** ***Right is Wrong: How the Lunatic Fringe Hijacked America, Shredded the Constitution, and Made Us All Less Safe (And What You Need To Know To End The Madness)*** *by Arianna Huffington*
Anne Applebaum	34	**BOOKS NOW WE KNOW** ***Spies: The Rise and Fall of the KGB in America*** *by John Earl Haynes, Harvey Klehr, and Alexander Vassiliev*
Chase Twitchell	38	**POEM NEGLIGENT WORLDICIDE**
Peter Green	39	**BOOKS A BYZANTINE HEART** ***C.P. Cavafy: Collected Poems*** *and* ***C.P. Cavafy: The Unfinished Poems*** *translated, with introduction and commentary, by Daniel Mendelsohn*
Virginia Konchan	44	**POEM RESURRECTION OF JOHN KEATS**
David Thomson	45	**BOOKS MARVELOUSLY SELFISH** ***Kazan on Directing*** *edited and with commentary by Robert Cornfield*
		WASHINGTON DIARIST
Leon Wieseltier	48	**CONTRARY CHANCES**

Cover illustration by David Cowles

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THE NEW REPUBLIC (ISSN 0028-6583), Vol. 240, Number 10, Issue 4,861, June 17, 2009. (Printed in the United States on May 29, 2009.) Published bi-weekly (except for skipped publication dates of April 29 and December 16, 2009) at 1331 H Street, NW, Suite 700, Washington, D.C. 20005. Telephone (202) 508-4444. For advertising inquiries, please contact Lauren Sims at (202) 508-4444. Yearly subscriptions, $79.97; foreign, $119.97 (U.S. funds); Canada, $99.97 (U.S. funds). Back issues, $8.00 domestic and $10.00 foreign/Canada (includes postage & handling).

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Periodicals postage paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing offices. Rights and permissions: fax (202) 628-9383. Indexed in Readers' Guide, Media Review Digest. For hard copy reprints, call (202) 508-4444. Microform, Canadian Periodical Index, and CD-ROM are available through ProQuest, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Telephone (800) 521-0600. Postmaster: Send changes of address to The New Republic, P.O. Box 420235, Palm Coast, FL 32142-0235. Member, BPA Worldwide. Send letters and unsolicited manuscripts to letters@tnr.com. Poetry submissions must be e-mailed to poetry@tnr.com. **For subscription inquiries or problems call (800) 827-1289 or visit our website at www.tnr.com.**

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You deserve a factual look at . . .

The Deadly Threat of a Nuclear-Armed Iran

What can the world, what can the USA, what can Israel do about it?

Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has declared publicly – not once, but repeatedly – that Israel must be "wiped off the map." That effort, the destruction of Israel, seems to be the main goal of Iranian policy. When Iranian missiles are paraded through the streets of Tehran, the destination "to Jerusalem" is clearly stenciled on them.

What are the facts?

A death wish for Israel. Ahmadinejad and the ayatollah who is the "supreme leader" have publicly mused that one or two nuclear bombs would obliterate Israel, but that, though it would cause devastating damage and millions of casualties, Iran would survive Israel's retaliatory attack. Iran is a huge country, with about 60 million inhabitants, so they are probably correct. And who can doubt that those religious fanatics would not hesitate to allow the destruction of much of their country and to sacrifice a third or even one-half of their population in order to eliminate the hated Jewish state? When our country was entangled with the Soviet Union in the bitter 40-year long "cold war," with both sides having sufficient nuclear weapons to destroy the opponent's country and its people, things were kept in place by MAD – Mutually Assured Destruction. However "evil" the leaders of the Soviet Union (the "Evil Empire") may have been, there was one great consolation and assurance: They were not crazy. But the Iranians and other Muslims are crazies, as we understand the concept. Because they take instructions directly from Allah, who tells them to kill the Jews and other infidels, whatever the cost.

Israel has no problem with Iran. They share no borders and have no territorial dispute. In fact, they face common Arab enemies and should be natural allies, as they indeed were under the Shah. Iran's death wish for Israel is based entirely on religious fanaticism. In contrast even to the intractable North Koreans, the determination of the Iranians is immutable. It cannot be changed by persuasion, by diplomacy, by sanctions or by threats.

Once Iran is in possession of nuclear weapons, it will not only be a deadly danger to Israel, but to all of the Middle East and to virtually all of Europe. The flow of oil from the Middle East, the lifeblood of the industrialized world, would be totally under its control and so would be the economies of all nations of the world, very much including the United States.

What is to be done? In 1981, then prime minister of Israel Menachem Begin, being aware of Iraq's nuclear ambitions and looming realization of those ambitions, decided that its nuclear reactor at Osiraq had to be destroyed. The IAF (Israeli Air Force) accomplished that in a daring and unprecedented raid. Iraq's nuclear capability was eliminated in one stroke, never to rise up again. Israel had done the world an enormous service. Had it not been for Israel's decisive action, the Iraqi conquest of Kuwait and, without question, also of Saudi Arabia and its enormous oil fields, and, for that matter, of Iran, could not have been prevented. Saddam Hussein would have been the ruler of the world.

The solution to the deadly threat that Iran poses to the world is obvious. Of course, diplomacy and persuasion, threats and promises, sticks and carrots – every possible means short of military action – should be used until it becomes clear even to the most obdurate that nothing can deviate Iran from its chosen path of becoming a nuclear power and to dominate the Middle East.

> "An attack on the Iranian nuclear installations would fall under the heading of "anticipatory self-defense," recognized and sanctioned by international law and by common sense."

There is reason to believe that the people of Iran, especially the young people, oppose the oppressive and theocratic regime of their country and are hostile to the mullahs who control everything. But the government has the tools of power firmly in its hands. It controls the instruments of coercion – it can kill people and it controls the oil money. While it would be most desirable and in the interest of the world to be able to foment an overthrow of the Iranian regime, that is an unrealistic and unattainable prospect.

Regrettably, there is only one solution to the terrible dilemma confronting the world, the unacceptable danger of a nuclear-armed Iran. The terror, the destruction and the 60 million dead of World War II could have been prevented at several times during the Nazi regime. But the Allied powers, under the leadership of Britain's prime minister Neville Chamberlain, opted for appeasement and for "peace in our time." We cannot afford to make that same mistake again. The world must give Iran an ultimatum: Desist immediately from the development of nuclear weapons; if you do not, we shall destroy the facilities that produce them. There still is a window of opportunity to do that. That window may close very soon. But who would do the job? The United States would be the obvious choice. But if the United States were in accord, Israel could do it, just as it did the job in 1981 in destroying Iraq's nuclear potential once and for all.

An attack on the Iranian nuclear installations would fall under the heading of "anticipatory self-defense," recognized and sanctioned by international law and by common sense. Nobody really knows for sure how far Iran is from reaching its goal — six months. six years? The experts disagree. But if Iran is not stopped now, it may well be too late not very long from now.

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Facts and Logic About the Middle East
P.O. Box 590359 ■ San Francisco, CA 94159
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The Mall

Backward Runs *Newsweek*

Blah blah newsmag remake blah blah.

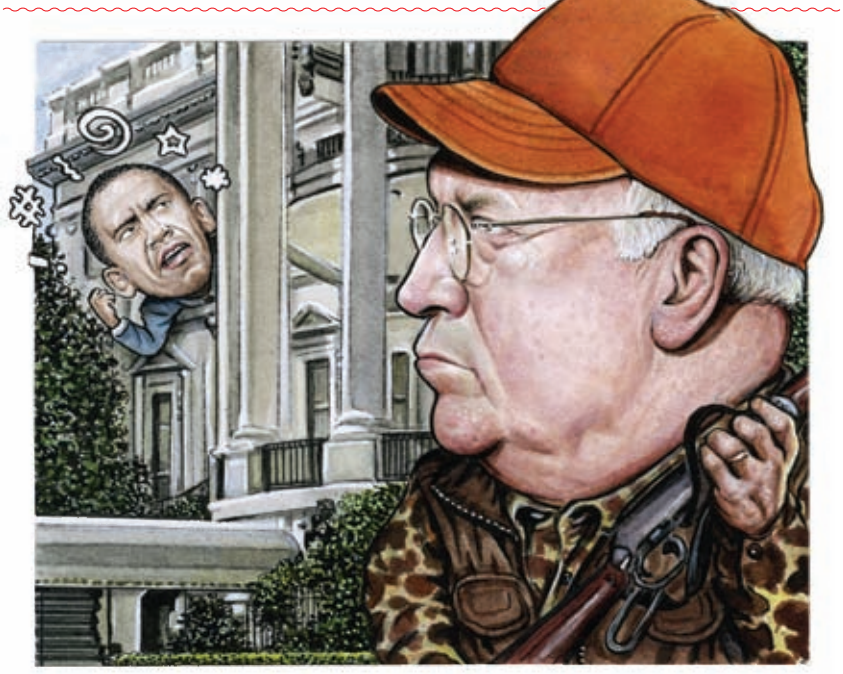
HAVING RECENTLY been dumped by *Time*, I naturally had great hopes for the much-anticipated makeover of *Newsweek*. Both surviving newsmags (*U.S. News* is said to exist still in some form, but no one I know has seen it lately) are in an Internet panic like that affecting newspapers. *Newsweek* has always been a bit faster on its feet. But, judging from its first issue, the new *Newsweek* is not going to be the instrument of my revenge, alas.

In his editor's letter—one of many traditional newsmagazine features that have survived the scythe of change—Jon Meacham says, "We are not pretending to be your guide through the chaos of the Information Age," which concedes a lot of ground from the get-go. Why not at least pretend? Why else would people pick it up, let alone subscribe? The newsmags face a choice. Actually, they've faced it since long before the Internet. Should they try to provide a complete picture of what happened last week? Or should they stop worrying about that and hope to find appeal in trends, service pieces, fine writing, muckraking exposés, provocative argument, and other traditional non-news magazine fare? Whenever they have an existential crisis—and this is not the first—they always make the wrong choice.

MEACHAM—A VERY smart and thoughtful guy, which, in my experience, is not necessarily true of all newsmagazine editors (all two, that is)—actually says that his model is "the great monthlies of old" like *Harper's* and *Esquire*. He says the building blocks of the new *Newsweek* will be "two kinds of stories": the "reported narrative" and "the argued essay." So what's wrong with that? Well, to start, those grand old monthlies at their primes had a smaller paying readership than *Newsweek* has at its supposed nadir. So duplicating their greatness could be a pyrrhic victory. Furthermore, while it's not impossible to get readers by peddling sheer enjoyment, it's a lot easier to peddle necessity, or at least usefulness: You *need* this magazine to sort out the world for you and to make sure you haven't missed anything. In short, you need it to be your guide through the chaos, as Meacham so eloquently describes what he intends to avoid. And, when something like the Internet comes along to make the chaos even more chaotic, you need your trusty guide more, not less. Possibly the dumbest slogan ever for a newsmag was one used briefly by *Time* a few years ago: "Make time for *Time*." Make time for *Time*? Who has that kind of time? If you can convince people that reading *Time* will *save* them time, then you may have a deal.

That said, Meacham's vision of a magazine full of exciting narrative and provocative arguments isn't terrible, if he could pull it off every week. Sadly, though, he has been defeated by what Mikhail Gorbachev used to call "the approaches of the stagnation period." He says he wants "provocative (but not partisan) arguments." Which would be what? "Let's paint the Capitol dome dark brown"? Or, "Try cooked carrots—they're not too bad"? It's not easy to be provocative if you're looking over your shoulder for the partisanship police. But Meacham's problem is more basic than that: The new *Newsweek*, judging from the first issue (which Meacham calls "a model of the form"), bizarrely resembles the old *Newsweek* more than the new *Newsweek* Meacham describes. It is cluttered with departments and headlines and labels and tiny features, all of which imply some

WHITE HOUSE WATCH *With* DREW FRIEDMAN



Hunting season's over, but Dick Cheney could care less.

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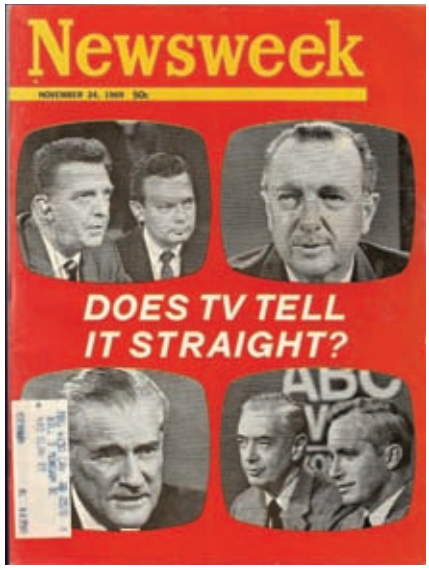
hierarchy or order in the editors' minds, but only add to the chaos in the readers'. Its longer pieces follow all the stale conventions of newsmagazine prose.

What, for example, is this graphic on the letters page? Why, for that matter, is there still a letters page? It's the first page of content you come to. Five one-paragraph comments on the issue published two weeks ago—room for little more than a thumbs up or down. On the Internet, thousands of people have their say immediately and at length. And, then, a self-parody: "Your thoughts on swine flu"—the cover story two weeks ago—"in six words." Hali McGrath of Berkeley, California, submitted, "Blah, blah, swine flu, blah blah." And *Newsweek* published it.

But back to the graphic. It lists what I guess are five articles from the issue two weeks ago, each attached to a percentage. A thin line heads east from the second item ("16% 'The Path of a Pandemic' "), turns south, and ends up at a pie chart (38 percent neutral, 21 percent positive, 41 percent critical). A tiny footnote says, "Does not add up to 100 due to letters received on other topics." Oh, I get it, I think. This is a breakdown by topic of letters—letters!—received about the issue two weeks ago, plus a breakdown of one topic (possibly the cover?) by approval. So now you know that twice as many people who wish to comment on "The Path of a Pandemic" than those who wish to comment on "Tom Daschle and Mitt Romney on Health Care" know where to find a stamp. Fascinating.

But enough about a two-week-old issue of *Newsweek*. Let's talk about a four-week-old issue of *Newsweek*. The next page of editorial content is an "update" by the author of *Newsweek*'s month-old cover story about former New York governor Eliot Spitzer. It discusses important ethical issues such as whether, in reporting that he and Spitzer had gone jogging together and Spitzer had pooped out, the author should have mentioned that he is 20 years younger. Also, whether *Newsweek*, in publishing the original article, was wrongly participating in Spitzer's rehabilitation. "I didn't write about the



process," he writes, "because I thought readers would find the story of private citizen Eliot Spitzer far more interesting than they'd find the story of how *Newsweek* journalist Jonathan Darman got the story." He'll know better next time. But is this article a "reported narrative"? Or is it a "provocative (but not partisan) argument"? Hard to say. The next page (labeled "Top of the Week") is Meacham's apologia (or is it a mea culpa, or maybe a cri de coeur?). That means the first three pages of content in the new *Newsweek* are about *Newsweek*.

The next page of content is headlined "Scope," with the explanatory subhead "news, scoops and the globe at a glance," which is pretty much what Meacham had said *Newsweek* was *not* going to cover anymore. But never mind the headline. Most of the page is a picture of Miss California in a white bikini. I know she's Miss California because of a quote from Donald Trump just over her right shoulder, with the added information that he had "allowed [her] to keep her crown." Her breasts are covered by a table of contents of the Scope section. These contents include "InternationaList" (short dispatches from foreign parts; no list that I can see); a source-greaser (flattering profile of a

figure who may prove useful) about CIA director Leon Panetta; something called the "Indignity Index," described as "an unscientific appraisal of dubious public behavior" (comedian Wanda Sykes gets a 12 for a rude joke about Rush Limbaugh, Kiefer Sutherland gets a 68 for some kind of unpleasant encounter at a party); a short, serious essay by Melinda Gates about building institutions in underdeveloped countries to help poor people save money; and so on.

I say "and so on" as if there is some pattern or similarity here. But the only thing these various features have in common is nothing more about Miss California. It's been said that the test of a newsmagazine is whether you would grab it if you'd been trapped in a coal mine for a week and had one hour to catch up. And, after a week trapped in a coal mine, perhaps an hour with a picture of Miss California in a bikini will be more useful than any explanation of why she's in the news. But the new *Newsweek* maintains the same irritating practice as the old one of half-explaining, which is no use either to those who already know the story or to those who don't.

For example, on the "Perspectives" page (quotes of the week) is a quote—"He's lanky, smart, tough, a sneaky stealth soldier"—identified as "Maj. Gen. William Nash on Lt. Gen. Stanley McChrystal, who was tapped to replace Gen. David McKiernan as head of U.S. operations in Afghanistan after McKiernan was asked to resign from his post." Got that? Through this blizzard of brass, we can discern the shadows of a story about Afghanistan. Maybe we should know all about it. But do we? In situations like this, we used to rely on newsmagazines to help us bluff. But this quote is no help

Department of Corrections

Donald Camp, former principal deputy assistant secretary for South Asia at the State Department and now senior director for South Asia at the National Security Council, was incorrectly identified as David Camp in "Airplane!" (May 20). Due to an editing error, the words "in July" were added incorrectly to a sentence on page 23 in "The Drone Wars" (June 3). The affected sentence should have read: "And, during this period, both bin Laden and Zawahiri, who are generally presumed to be living in or around the FATA, continued to release a stream of audio- and videotapes demonstrating that the Al Qaeda leadership was very much intact." We regret the errors.

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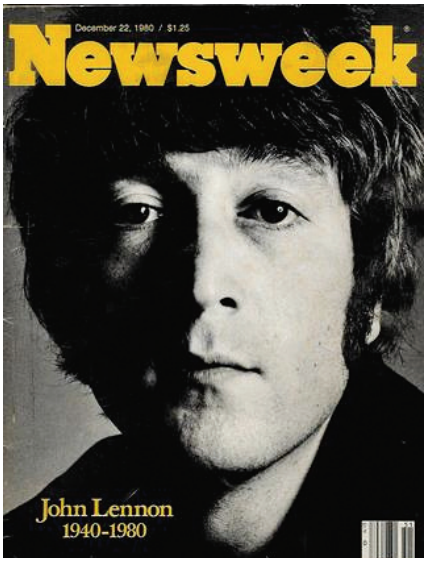
at all. The story seems to be about McKiernan's resignation, but the quote is about his successor. And what good is it to know that he is "lanky"?

My favorite feature in the Scope section, and possibly in this entire issue of *Newsweek*, is called (for no special reason that I can determine except for a failed attempt at a pun) "The Reign of Spain." And it consists of a handsome chart comparing the unemployment rate in Spain in December 2007 and in March 2009 with the unemployment rates in other countries on those same dates. Why Spain? Why those dates? Why these other countries? *Newsweek*'s entire explanation: "Unemployment in Spain is soaring as the country sheds thousands of low-skilled jobs."



Next comes a section called "The Take," apparently a ghetto for *Newsweek*'s columnists, who used to be sprinkled throughout the magazine. Reading six columnists right in a row might ordinarily be heavy slogging. But, in this case, the force and originality of their arguments and the beauty of their prose overwhelm any qualms. In fact, this magnificent section goes a long way toward justifying the entire misbegotten project. And I don't just say that because three of the six columnists are former colleagues of mine here at *The New Republic*. Or, perhaps, I do say it for that reason. Or is it the full-page photo of Fareed Zakaria in a white bikini that has numbed my critical faculties?

And so, we progress to "Features," which seems to be longer articles on myriad subjects, many written by outsiders (Michael Bloomberg, Tina Brown . . .), who are prized because they bring an independent luster. Also, you don't have to give them health care. But the section's lead story is the magazine's cover story: an essay about and interview with President Obama by Meacham himself. This kind of thing was a staple of the old newsmagazine, and it follows strict rules. It always opens with an anecdote or telling detail that flaunts the magazine's access to the great and illustrates whatever the point of the piece was supposed to be. Disappointingly, Meacham's reinvented *Newsweek* has not abandoned this stale formula.

Foreshadowed by the weak cover headline—"Obama on Obama"—Meacham's own opening anecdote is comically lame, reduced to using the temperature to gin up a bit of phony drama. Well, it seems that "last Wednesday, in the gathering cool of late afternoon," Obama was about to get on Air Force One to fly "to the heat of Arizona." He saw "a small crowd of schoolchildren and military personnel gathered with cameras and homemade signs" and went over to shake their hands. That's it, except for one more weather report: When he turned back to board the plane, "a breeze blew—and everyone scurried anew, to keep up with him."

Another piece in the issue—I guess it's supposed to be a "reported narrative . . . grounded in original observation and freshly discovered fact"—is about curing autism. "It's spring in Washington," the piece begins, "and Ari Ne'eman, with his navy suit and leather briefcase on wheels, is in between his usual flurry of meetings." It's spring in Washington. That doesn't seem to qualify as either an "original observation" or a "freshly discovered fact." Nor does it have any apparent relevance to the story that follows. Could it be a "provocative (but not partisan) argument"? And what about that blue suit? I have news for *Newsweek*: Washington is the blue-suit capital of the world. Let's give them the leather briefcase on wheels.

I could go on. But you should buy a copy of the current *Newsweek* and judge for yourself whether the "argued essay" you have just read is "grounded in reason and supported by evidence." Don't forget to cancel your subscription to *Time* while you're at it.

Michael Kinsley

Michael Kinsley is a former editor of The New Republic and the editor, most recently, of Creative Capitalism: A Conversation with Bill Gates, Warren Buffett, and Other Economic Leaders.

Plan of Attack

Bob Woodward versus the White House.

In early May, White House Counsel Greg Craig circulated a memo inside the West Wing. Part of a series of memos on protocol, it explained how to deal with writers researching books and articles on the White House. (Craig's unsurprising instructions: Clear interview requests with the press office.) While the memo didn't mention any journalists by name—and while there are currently no fewer than half a dozen major reporters under contract to write books about the nascent Obama presidency and the 2008 campaign, any of whom could conceivably end up embarrassing the administration—there is one person in particular the White House is undoubtedly nervous about: Bob Woodward.

Since the inauguration, the *Washington Post* legend has been quietly reporting a new book on the Obama White House. "I'm in the preliminary stages of working on it," Woodward confirmed to me by phone recently. "I'm working on it and making progress."

Officially, the White House says it is not adopting a press strategy to respond to Woodward. Ben LaBolt, an Obama spokesman, wrote in an e-mail that the Craig memo "was not issued in relation to any inquiry related to a specific reporter or author." Still, there is reason to think that Woodward might make the administration particularly anxious. "Every White House is wary of Woodward," says *New York Times* White House correspondent Peter Baker, who worked alongside him at the *Post*. What's more, Obama's White House is known to hate process stories, exactly the sort of exhaustive, in-the-room descriptions of high-level debates at which Woodward excels. And, even worse, Woodward has some extra motivation to fill his next book with big scoops. His fourth and final Bush book, *The War Within*, sold just 159,000 copies, according to Nielsen BookScan, far below his third Bush installment, *State of Denial*, which sold more than half a million. "The last time I talked to him about books, earlier this year, he had been lamenting the fact his last Bush book didn't sell as well," one of Woodward's friends told me.

And an especially hungry Bob Woodward is especially bad news if you're one of the people being written about. "Good luck," another Woodward friend told me when I asked if the White House will succeed in keeping Woodward out. "If you want to hide things from Bob, it always comes out. It always does."

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As former White House officials have made clear, Woodward can easily become a vexing problem at the highest reaches of an administration. In his 1999 memoir *All Too Human*, George Stephanopoulos detailed the fallout from Woodward's 1994 best-seller, *The Agenda*, which helped to define the Clinton presidency as freewheeling and dysfunctional. "His books invariably created embarrassing headlines for their subjects, but his sources were assumed to be the most important, connected, and knowledgeable people in Washington. I was wary of Woodward, but flattered and curious too," the former Clinton spokesman wrote about his decision to meet Woodward and grant an interview.

Stephanopoulos explains Woodward's reporting style: "He flashes a glimpse of what he knows, shaded in a largely negative light, with the hint of more to come, setting up a series of prisoner's dilemmas in which each prospective source faces a choice: Do you cooperate and elaborate in return (you hope) for learning more and earning a better portrayal—for your boss and yourself? Or do you call his bluff by walking away in the hope that your reticence will make the final product less authoritative and therefore less damaging? If no one talks, there is no book. But someone—then everyone—always talks."

Not only did Stephanopoulos end up talking, he also passed along a letter from Woodward to President Clinton, who himself sat for an interview. It was a decision the president came to regret. Stephanopoulos writes that the "repercussions were immediate" when Woodward's book was released. (Clinton fired his chief of staff, Mack McLarty, and brought on Leon Panetta.) The president was said to be furious at Woodward's portrayal of his administration.

From the outset, the Bush White House decided to cooperate with Woodward. "It was a different era when the first Woodward book came out," recalls former White House press secretary Ari Fleischer. "President Bush was riding high, and events were going well." Fleischer says that Bush himself urged staffers to cooperate with Woodward, especially then–Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, who was reluctant to grant an interview (he did). "The message got down to everybody: 'Talk to him,'" Fleischer says. Bush sat for interviews for Woodward's first two installments, and, even though the president didn't personally cooperate with Woodward's third book, *State of Denial*, Fleischer says that "the White House tried to be helpful."

This time around, Woodward told me that, while he had heard about the Obama White House's effort to manage access for writers, he was not worried. "People make their individual choices about what they're going to do, even in the White House and in the government," he said. "Over my four decades of working on books, you find that some people will help, some people won't help, some will help at certain stages and not at others, some people won't help at the beginning but will help later on. That's reporting."

"What he does," one Woodward friend told me, "is he just turns on the vacuum cleaner and goes around Washington scooping up information until he gets a focus." That focus, of course, is subject to change. For his first book on Bush, Woodward told me he initially reported on the Bush tax cut, which dominated headlines in the languid summer of 2001, before September 11 jolted the White House onto its war footing. "In the case of Bush, after he was elected, I decided the center of gravity was his tax cut," Woodward said. "So I worked for nine months on his tax cut. I was doing the last interviews on the Hill on 9/11, and, of course, the center of gravity shifted to national security, so I shifted. I still have those boxes sitting in my office. It's a book about the Bush tax cut that was never written and probably never will be written."

One possibility, and a potentially worrisome one for this administration, is that Woodward will choose to focus on national security—the area where Obama has always seemed hypersensitive about being portrayed as weak and directionless. If he does, a likely source could be Obama's national security adviser, Jim Jones. A couple of years ago, Jones was a guest of Woodward at his wife Elsa Walsh's fiftieth birthday party held at Sally Quinn and Ben Bradlee's house. "He and Elsa were glued to Jones at the cocktail party before the dinner started," one attendee told me. Another source could be David Petraeus. A favorite Washington parlor game consists of trying to figure out whether various officials talk to Woodward based on how generously he depicts them. If that method is accurate, then it suggests that Petraeus, who was portrayed glowingly in *The War Within*, was a Woodward source—and perhaps will be again.

Of course, Woodward is not the only well-known author the White House has to worry about. Journalists writing books on Obama's presidency include *Newsweek* columnist Jonathan Alter, *New Yorker* Washington correspondent (and former TNR staffer) Ryan Lizza, and TNR's Noam Scheiber; two campaign books—one by Haynes Johnson and *Washington Post* reporter

David Cowles

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Dan Balz, the other by *New York* magazine's John Heilemann and *Time*'s Mark Halperin—are also in the works.

But Woodward isn't fazed. "As they say in the book business, you can't judge a book by the proposal," he told me. "There are a lot of people doing books with angles that may or may not pan out." Woodward, it seems, not only plays head games with his sources, but also with the competition.

GABRIEL SHERMAN

Prisoners Dilemma

The poor schmo who has to move all the Gitmo detainees.

DANIEL FRIED may have the most thankless job in Washington. While Barack Obama got to deliver the dazzling promise that he would close the Guantánamo Bay prison camp and turn the page on America's global image, Fried has been left to handle the hardest part of that task: finding new homes for the Guantánamo detainees who, for political or legal reasons, can neither be tried nor imprisoned in the United States. Perhaps half the 240 detainees now in custody will have to be relocated to countries other than their native lands because they risk being tortured there (or worse) upon their return. For Fried, that means shuttling endlessly between foreign capitals to plead for help, and often to be met by extortionist demands and haughty lectures from foreign diplomats. It is grueling work, making the respected career diplomat something like a door-to-door salesman peddling the human equivalent of radioactive waste.

But perhaps the hardest part is handling the obstacles that keep cropping up in Washington itself. First, there's the ticking clock of Barack Obama's pledge to shut Guantánamo by January 2010—a bold statement that defied the warnings of advisers who said that, if closing Guantánamo were easy, George W. Bush would have made good on his own stated wishes to do so himself. Then, there's the craven opportunism of members of Congress who want to look tough on terrorism by vowing to block any effort to resettle the wrongly detained here in America. "It is a tough job, to put it mildly," says Fried. Or, as one friend simply commented after the latest round of congressional grandstanding against accepting the detainees, "Poor Dan."

THANKLESS WORK isn't a new experience for Fried. As the State Department's desk officer and ambassador to Poland in the mid- and late 1980s, Fried found himself in the minority arguing in favor of greater U.S. engagement with Eastern Europe's emerging democratic movements. To this day, Fried keeps a poster in his office of Gary Cooper wearing *High Noon* cowboy garb and walking toward a duel—but with a ballot in hand instead of a six-shooter. The image adorns a Solidarity poster in advance of Poland's June 4, 1989, democratic election, which brought an end to communist rule. Fried calls it a reminder of the perils of realism, whose proponents argued at the time against engaging with the nascent democracies in Eastern Europe. "I was a very lonely person," he says of his efforts. "He is a very effective diplomat, but he also has a very strong streak of idealism," says Fried's longtime friend Tom Malinowski, Washington advocacy director of Human Rights Watch.

Fried was also something of a lonely figure within the Bush administration, where he handled European issues on the National Security Council before becoming assistant secretary of state for Europe in May 2005. Although he played the part of loyal soldier, Fried was never much of a W. man at heart. He never relished the bashing of "old Europe," and, in particular, he "was very unhappy with the impact of the Bush administration's Guantánamo and detainee policies and was strongly in favor of changing them," says a former colleague. Fried confided in this person a sense of "moral obligation" to reverse the damage to America's image abroad.

Friends and colleagues describe Fried as genial but highly driven, a diminutive long-distance runner who is such a workaholic that he is currently walking with a severe limp after a knee injury because his work schedule hasn't left time for surgery. He can also be a fierce bureaucratic infighter. For decades, he has sparred with another former ambassador to Poland, Christopher Hill, now U.S. ambassador to Iraq—who, as a fellow State Department desk officer, was among those skeptical of Lech Walesa's Solidarity movement; for years thereafter, Fried and Hill reportedly sniped and undercut one another within the foreign policy bureaucracy. The combination of idealism, experience, and bureaucratic toughness cheered human rights advocates when Obama officials revealed their plan to tap Fried for the Gitmo portfolio.

But Fried has been limping, as it were, from the start. Though word of his job was leaked in March, his appointment didn't happen until mid-May—thanks to a small-minded Senate delay of the confirmation of his successor, Phil Gordon, due to Gordon's position on the arcane but politically charged issue of the Armenian genocide. The administration was also slow to assemble a task force to pore through the files of the Guantánamo detainees and make determinations about how each should be treated, a process scheduled to finish in July but likely to drag on longer.

At the moment, Fried is largely focused on the question of what to do with the roughly 50 to 60 detainees whom the Bush and/or Obama administrations have "cleared," meaning that they won't be charged with any crimes and don't pose a major risk to U.S. security. The obvious answer would be to send them home—except that, in most of these cases, home means a place like Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, or Syria, where many of the men would be greeted with torture and possibly execution. (One Libyan detainee who returned home in 2006 after detention at a CIA "black site" was found dead in his prison cell last month after reports of torture by his jailors. Seven more Libyans remain at Guantánamo.)

Though few noticed it, the Bushies spent years doggedly hunting for new places to settle these same men. "It was like a duck—calm on the surface but paddling furiously beneath the water," says John Bellinger, a former top legal adviser to the Bush State Department. But it wasn't easy. The dilemma is exemplified by the case of 17 Chinese Muslim separatists known as Uighurs, who visited Afghanistan to train for their indigenous fight against Beijing but apparently never fought or plotted against the United States. With a return to China tantamount to a death sentence for the Uighurs, Bush officials asked roughly 100 countries to take them in. They found only two takers: the tiny Pacific island nation of Kiribati, to which the Uighurs said "thanks, but no thanks," according to one source, and Muslim Albania, which accepted five men in 2006 but, under severe pressure from China, will accept no more.

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The progress under Obama has been similarly slight: In February, Britain accepted a one-time U.K. resident of Ethiopian descent who was arrested in Pakistan in 2002; and, earlier this month, France took in a lone Algerian arrested for plotting an anti-U.S. attack in Bosnia, a move the Associated Press described as "a gesture" to the new president. But Obama needs more than

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gestures. And Fried seems to be struggling to make that happen.

Thus far, Europe has seemed like the most promising destination, because of both popular support for Obama there and Fried's extensive experience on the continent. "He knows the Europeans better than anyone in government," says Matthew Waxman, a Columbia University law professor who handled detainee issues during the Bush administration. But Fried turned up few takers last month during his first swing through European capitals. He won't name specific countries, but, in early May, word leaked word that Fried visited Berlin with Attorney General Eric Holder, where the men asked Germany to accept ten Gitmo Uighurs. The German government says it is considering the request, but the prospects look dim: Bavaria's interior minister has called the idea "extremely naïve," and asked why the United States can't take the Uighurs.

Further sabotaging Fried's efforts is the recent political posturing on Capitol Hill. In recent weeks, several key members from both parties in Congress, including Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, have declared their firm opposition to allowing Guantánamo detainees into the United States, including ones who would be locked up in a supermax prison. Even the Uighurs are anathema to many members of Congress. Although press reports have suggested that the Obama administration might place a few Uighurs in northern Virginia, the state's two Democratic senators, Jim Webb and Mark Warner, have expressed strong and conditional opposition, respectively. Republican Congressman Frank Wolf, who represents the area, says he doesn't care who the Uighurs went to Afghanistan to fight. "A terrorist is a terrorist is a terrorist," he recently told Fox News.

And the more members of Congress fulminate over the idea of allowing detainees on U.S. soil, the more foreign countries blanch. "We want to be helpful. But I think it's going to be really tough to sell new detainees if the U.S. doesn't make any gesture on their own territory," says one European diplomat. While his country sincerely wants to help, he says, the diplomat concedes it is unlikely to accept more than a token handful of detainees, thanks in part to a wary public whose view is "Guantánamo wasn't our idea." "The exaggerated quality of much of the debate in the U.S. has obviously hurt," Fried concedes.

That's why some observers say that the more important diplomacy isn't overseas, but on Capitol Hill, where Obama finds himself at cross-purposes with ostensible allies like Reid and Webb. Any official act by Congress to prohibit the transfer of any detainees to the United States, says Malinowski, of Human Rights Watch, "would be deadly for Dan's efforts."

But Fried has other things to worry about. Beyond the hodgepodge of 60 cleared detainees of mixed nationalities, he must also find homes for many of the 97 Yemenis now in U.S. custody, few of whom are expected to be charged. The Obama team had hoped to send them back to Yemen, but a recent spike in Al Qaeda activity there, plus Yemen's outlandish reported demand of a $1-million payoff *per detainee* has Fried hunting elsewhere in the region—a game of Middle Eastern politics less suited to his background. "Dan's going to need to reach out far beyond Europe," says Sarah Mendelson, director of the Human Rights and Security Initiative at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Ultimately, says Bellinger, the former Bush official, it may be impossible to find homes in humane countries for the vast majority of the men at Guantánamo. As a fallback, the United States might have to repatriate some of the men to their repressive home countries after all—which would leave Fried the task of winning promises of good treatment from those governments. "Those are some of the toughest negotiations," says Bellinger, "where we say we have to have high-level, ironclad, specific assurances that [detainees] will not be mistreated, but with some kind of monitoring mechanism."

Fried doesn't pretend that the road ahead will be easy. But he clearly wishes he could have more support from members of Congress who don't seem to appreciate that the Obama administration doesn't want dangerous terrorists running loose any more than they do. "I'm not unrealistic about terrorism," says Fried, who was in the White House on September 11. "I was in the situation room when they sent our names out to an off-site, so that, in case we were hit, they wouldn't have to do that tedious work with dental records. So I am perfectly aware of the threat that terrorism poses." But keeping Guantánamo open poses its own kind of threat, he notes. And that's why the clock is ticking: eight months and counting. Poor Dan, indeed.

Michael Crowley

D'Escoto Inferno

Meet the Sandinista who runs the United Nations.

At the United Nations, there are, as you'd expect, flagrantly pointless press briefings going on in some wing or another, concerning some topic or another, at any given hour of the day. The diplomats and reporters accept the custom with knowing smirks and lazily upraised hands. It's the standard kabuki. Except, that is, when Reverend Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann is speaking. The president of the U.N. General Assembly, d'Escoto has apparently decided, at age 76, that he has no time left for politesse, and his briefings are another animal entirely—the kind of invective-laced bravura jags perfected by Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez, who, as it happens, are two of d'Escoto's heroes.

Take a March showing the Nicaraguan priest and onetime Sandinista put on after returning from a tour through Asia and Europe, during which he had cozied up to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and defended Sudanese President Omar Al Bashir against Darfur-related war crimes charges. Back in New York and pressed by reporters about such controversial stands, he scoffed at Washington's demonization of Ahmadinejad, given its "canonization of the worst of dictators," like Marcos and Pinochet. He blamed the United States for undermining the United Nations in the run-up to the Iraq war. He suggested that the Bashir indictment was racist and tied it (and, if his furrowed brow and handwaving were any indication, the Darfur carnage itself) to the White House. "Who first raised the issue of genocide?" he said. "*Bush*. George W. Bush. That should tell you quite a bit already."

What made this monologue so startling was that it appeared not in the dark days of the previous U.S. administration, but in the early euphoria surrounding Barack Obama. Indeed, at this point Susan Rice, Obama's ambassador to Turtle Bay, could take on a full-time staffer for the sole purpose of reprimanding d'Escoto. In March, her deputy told *The Washington Post* that he "has repeatedly abused his position to pursue his personal agenda, and in doing so he diminishes the office and harms the General Assembly." Herein lies the challenge for the Obama administration: To make good on its promise of better using the United Nations, it doesn't just need to navigate the power politics of the Security Council. It must figure out how to manage diplomats like Reverend d'Escoto

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and the restiveness in the U.N. ranks he represents.

When its soporific secretary-general, Ban Ki Moon, began work in 2007, the United Nations was in arguably the worst shape of its 60-year history—a byword for political impotence, with the war in Iraq stumbling into its fifth year and the rockets flying in Gaza, and a possible breeding ground for corruption, with Kofi and Kojo Annan having been investigated in the Oil-for-Food scandal. The contempt for the place expressed over the years by the likes of Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Jeane Kirkpatrick, to say nothing of John Bolton, suddenly seemed all too justified. Even devoted internationalists and liberals found themselves asking whether it still served a purpose. What was desperately needed, it was agreed, was a revitalizing figure, a post-cold-war Dag Hammarskjöld who could make the United Nations relevant again.

Ban is emphatically not that figure. He began work in 2007 with little fanfare and has governed with less. In certain quarters, the beleaguered Korean is known as *Ban Ki Who*? And that quiescence has left an opening through which d'Escoto has charged—carrying all the baggage from his colorful past.

Born in Los Angeles to a well-off Nicaraguan diplomat, d'Escoto entered the Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America in his twenties and later attended Columbia Journalism School. A classics scholar trained in the Maryknoll priesthood, he made his name as an exponent of Liberation Theology, a movement that mingled the church reforms of the 1960s with the Marxist ideology then in vogue in Latin America. He allied himself with the Sandinistas in the late 1970s. The Vatican denounced Liberation Theology, and Pope John Paul II, angered at d'Escoto's leftist leanings and support for the Sandinistas, eventually barred him from administering sacraments and public masses. By that point, however, d'Escoto had risen through the ranks of the Sandinista regime to the post of foreign minister after befriending the right members of the Sandinista brass—in particular, a young fighter named Daniel Ortega.

D'Escoto's suspicion of the United States is not simply ideological, but personal. One CIA manual distributed to the Contras recommended terrorizing non-military personnel, including priests, and mentioned d'Escoto by name. And that certainly comported with the Sandinista version of events: In 1983, the Nicaraguan government alleged that d'Escoto was being targeted for assassination by CIA operatives who allegedly planned to give him a bottle of liqueur laced with thallium. The priest became something of a folk hero to the Nicaraguan left, which regained power in 2006 and nominated him to preside over the General Assembly.

When I met him in early April, d'Escoto, a short, round, balding man who has an unmistakable clerical warmth about him, gave me a hug, his preferred form of greeting. He suffers from Ménière's syndrome, an inner-ear condition that upsets his balance, so he was eager to return to his chair. The one time we'd spoken previously, two months prior, he'd referred to the IMF's policies as "bullshit." He'd also said that, if it was up to him, he'd see the Security Council "abolished entirely." Now he was more measured—kind of.

"We're trying to do something that is really quite revolutionary," he said, leaning forward. "The world has been living with laws and a design of government that is very exclusive. The rules for financial, monetary, commercial relations in the world were imposed—well, the United States imposed everything. Clearly it has been disastrous. Now we're seeing the consequences of it." But, he said, the global recession "is a great opportunity. The difficulties that the world is going through right now make it clear that we have no option but to put a halt on greed and social irresponsibility. The time has come to *behave*."

D'Escoto is a far cry from General Assembly presidents past, who've been notable mostly for their lack of notability. This is largely because the Assembly bows in almost all matters to the Security Council. Jan Eliasson, a Swede who was Assembly president from 2005 to 2006 and then became the U.N. special envoy to Darfur, said he couldn't get the Assembly to so much as put the issue of Darfur on the agenda, because its members knew the Security Council would have the final say. "I felt pretty powerless," he said.

D'Escoto has received praise, and censure, for trying to change this power dynamic. Even if Washington likes to dismiss the Assembly as a glacially paced rogues' gallery bogged down in cold war grievances and obsessed with castigating Israel, which it more than occasionally is, the Assembly and its president should, according to the U.N. Charter, have more power than they do. The president is arguably the organization's highest-ranking official and, with representatives from nearly every country on the planet, the Assembly is the only body that can actually be said to represent the world. What's more, unhindered by the veto that often stymies the Security Council, some diplomats argue that the Assembly is actually better suited to carrying out the United Nations' mission of promoting peace and security.

To be sure, the United Nations is never going to be a democratic institution—in no small part because countries like the United States have little interest in empowering men like d'Escoto. But some say the Nicaraguan has made more progress toward getting the United Nations to discuss Security Council reforms—meaning, for the most part, sharing some of the power currently held by the body's five permanent members—than many of his predecessors. Swiss U.N. Ambassador Peter Maurer told me that "the most important thing is that formal negotiations [on reform] have started in part because d'Escoto pushed for them."

But even those sympathetic to d'Escoto's goals suggest that the man himself is not up to the task. Some Assembly members complain that d'Escoto is inaccessible and removed, eschewing the working lunches and dinners and cocktail parties where the body's diplomats get to know one another and do a lot of their business. (D'Escoto claims this is largely because of the Ménière's syndrome.) He is said to have an icy relationship with Ban and the Secretariat. He sometimes seems unprepared on issues and uninterested in the procedural demands of his position.

Whatever the case, his efforts have bogged down. When we spoke, d'Escoto admitted that he'd more or less given up on Security Council reform. "It's needed," he said, "but I don't think the time is right."

D'Escoto's attempts to renovate the IMF and World Bank, meanwhile, are stalling. He put Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz in charge of a commission to recommend changes (other special advisers include, not surprisingly, Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn), and the group suggested forming a global council to oversee financial institutions, requiring greater transparency and instituting less onerous lending terms. But the consensus seems to be that, even if reform is a worthy project, now is precisely *not* the time to pursue it. As former U.N. undersecretary-general Brian Urquhart put it, "Everyone is relying on the IMF at the moment."

ANTHONY RUSSO

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But what was probably the nadir of d'Escoto's tenure came during the emergency session on Gaza he called in January. According to diplomats who were present during the final marathon six-hour meeting, d'Escoto acquitted himself disastrously. After a draft resolution was introduced by the Palestinians, Egyptians, and a European bloc, d'Escoto apparently tried to insert a vying resolution more condemnatory of Israel, crafted with Syria, Libya, and Cuba. In other words, he ignored the preference of the Palestinians themselves. He was only stopped when the Egyptian ambassador demanded to be given the floor back.

Susan Rice's office refused to comment for this article. According to a spokesman, they have no interest in aggrandizing d'Escoto. But perhaps there is hope. In April, d'Escoto confessed to me that, when watching Obama's recent speech in Strasbourg, France, he had had something of an epiphany. "I began to see Obama as more than a great political leader. I thought I was seeing in him a great moral and spiritual leader," he said. Any lovefest won't last long. D'Escoto's tenure ends in September. Next in line after Nicaragua for the General Assembly presidency—Libya.

JAMES VERINI

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Picture Imperfect

What the torture photos can't tell us.

WHAT IS THERE to say about photographs we have not seen? There is a good deal to say, when those photographs document the abuse of prisoners in Iraq and Afghanistan. The U.S. government has in its possession as many as 2,000 images that have not been made public, a cache that will add to, but probably not significantly alter, the story we know from the photographs and videos first seen five years ago, taken as U.S. military personnel brutalized prisoners at Abu Ghraib. The lawsuits demanding the release of these photographs under the Freedom of Information Act date back to the middle years of the Bush administration, and now, the Obama administration, after initially agreeing to a court-ordered release, has reversed course, citing the security of our troops and the danger of giving further material for propaganda to terrorists in the Arab world.

The arguments of the American Civil Liberties Union and other organizations that support release cannot be taken lightly. The courts have already concluded, in a number of decisions, that even the possibility that these photographs might endanger American troops does not justify their being withheld. Some have said Obama realizes that the release of the photographs will occur sooner rather than later and has been mostly trying to avoid their being published on the eve of his trip to Egypt. So is the Obama administration standing in the way of the truth? If we do not see these photographs, are we being denied some information that we need to have now? I am not convinced.

PHOTOGRAPHIC TRUTH is a particular kind of truth, and that is the case even when the photograph has not been doctored or edited. In going back to the courts to urge that these pictures not be released, the Obama administration is acknowledging this very fact. The argument against releasing them is not that they are not truthful, but, rather, that they represent an aspect of the truth about U.S. behavior in Iraq that Islamic militants will be able to use to create lies about the United States. The repetition of images on television and the Internet—and this is as much the case with our 24/7 news cycle as with the propaganda campaigns of Islamic militants—is a form of editorializing that, by its very nature, reshapes the photographic image, which in the first place represents a singular act of brutalization or the results of a particular sequence of acts.

The argument has been made that the wide distribution of torture photographs helps to concentrate the public's imagination, rendering ideas of brutality and suffering concrete. This is surely true, but it is also true that the public can become inured to even the most violent pictures, can claim image overload, can simply turn away. Photographic images should never become a substitute for the development of the moral imagination, for the ability to comprehend horrors we have not ourselves experienced or for which there is little or no documentation. Sometimes we need to believe things we cannot see, not as a matter of religious faith but of moral conviction.

Everybody can call to mind some of the photographs from Abu Ghraib. There is the shot of Lynndie England, the boyish military prison guard, holding a leash at the other end of which is a naked prisoner flat on the floor, pulled half out of his cell. And there is another photograph of a prisoner, his head covered by a conical hood, his outstretched arms attached to wires, standing on a box. These pictures derive from a three-month period, October to December 2003, that has been the subject of a number of military trials and convictions. That these pictures were taken by the perpetrators, as trophies of a kind, has been, for some viewers, nearly as unsettling as the abuse itself. Here is a glimpse of a mentality that Americans did not want to see, certainly not in their countrymen. From a legal point of view, the self-satisfied looks on the faces of the torturers as they pose for the camera certainly reveals a good deal about their mental state. But the ugliness of the self-documentation—the guys-and-gals-having-a-wild-time-together side of the photographic record—can also confuse the issue. The stupidity of the photographs should not be allowed to detract from their monstrousness, which is exactly what Rush Limbaugh and callers on his show were trying to do when they argued that this was just frat-house stuff, people letting off steam, horsing around.

Photographs, in and of themselves, do not necessarily tell us very much. A certain kind of photographic literalism has made it easier for some to argue that these were isolated acts. All there is, so this argument goes, is in the photograph. What you see is what you get. But the grotesque particularity of certain shots can be said, if not to exactly distort the truth, then certainly to skew the truth. There are several close-up photographs of a male prisoner's nipple with a smiley face inscribed in what looks like magic marker. The pop culture sadism is sick-making, no question about it, but if you linger too long here you are succumbing to a diversion. The picture cannot tell us who encouraged or ignored such behavior, or who was responsible for creating an atmosphere in which such things took place. While much of what we know about the lawless conduct of some American soldiers in Iraq comes from these photographs, more probably derives from non-photographic sources: from military documents, congressional testimony, evidence of many kinds. Certainly, the photographs should not be considered without captions. To study them without being aware of the circumstances under which they were produced is to accept them as autonomous images with their own integrity, and that is obscene.

IN THE FIVE YEARS since these pictures were first seen on "60 Minutes," there have been a number of efforts

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to decode them, and some of the interpretation strikes me as not so much mistaken as beside the point. It is easy to see that TV news, which is always looking for the next flashpoint, can collapse a complex story into an image that, however horrific, is only one piece of evidence in a story that is even more terrible, if understood in its entirety. But there is also a danger in lingering for too long over the individual photographs, in submitting them to psychological or sociological or art-historical analysis. Soon after the first pictures from Abu Ghraib were released, they were compared to online S&M pornography, and the suggestion was made that soldiers who had not seen Internet porn would have never thought of the leashes, the stress positions, the mortifying nudity, the simulated sex. I worry that this recourse to theories about the psychology of the perpetrators, this effort to give their pathological behavior a sociological setting, can blunt the plain horror of what was done, can make it all seem somehow interesting, the material for a novel or a movie. There have also been comparisons made between the Abu Ghraib photographs and Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs of consensual S&M sex, and this is another line of thinking I find inherently troubling, a form of aggrandizement. The very mention of Mapplethorpe's name adds interest, even cachet to these abhorrent acts. Why dress up the ugly truth? My feeling is that violent power relationships are inherently appealing to certain individuals, and that there could have been military police on duty at Abu Ghraib who felt the urge to act as they did even without a little nudge from Internet porn.

I also resist the connections that have been made between photographs from Abu Ghraib and various works of art, whether Goya's *Disasters of War* or Picasso's *Guernica*. The impulse to see connections between the art of the past and photographic images taken without any conscious thought of creating art can be very strong, especially among those who are familiar with the art in the museums. Sometimes the associations are almost impossible to avoid. Who can forget the news photograph taken at Kent State in 1970, with a young woman kneeling over the body of a student who has just been shot to death, her arms outstretched and mouth open in horror, in a pose that might have come straight out of the iconography of ecstasy and grief in Hellenistic art? But what precisely does this comparison tell us except that the artists of the past were acute observers of human behavior? A recent book by the art historian Stephen F. Eisenman, *The Abu Ghraib Effect*, traces certain gestures and situations that we encounter in the Abu Ghraib images all the way back to the Greeks, and, although Eisenman is very judicious about the connections that he makes, I cannot help wishing that he would have left the pictures from Abu Ghraib as what they are, namely evidence of particular, terrible things done by particular men and women at a particular moment. When heinous acts are associated with artistic acts, there is a danger of amelioration, or, at least, the appearance of amelioration.

Whatever the courts decide, however, we would do well to remember that we can expect too much from photography, that we need to respect the limits of photographic truth. Living in a society that is as widely and vibrantly uncensored as ours, we have an obligation to consider the value of self-censorship, of a reticence or discretion that can shape the onslaught of information. While we cannot achieve knowledge without information—this is a fundamental fact in any democratic society—information does not always advance knowledge, and photographic information in its raw form can mean many different things. We did not need the Abu Ghraib photographs to tell us that men and women do terrible things. The significance of these pictures is particular, specific. And their specificity should be approached with a certain reticence. We must not aggrandize the torturer's photographic acts of self-aggrandizement. And then there is the matter of the privacy of the victims, some of whom may well recognize themselves in these photographs and, I would presume, would not want such images disseminated around the world. No wonder some of the photographs have been published with the faces or genitals blurred, a distortion of photographic truth that brings home to us in the most immediate way the reality of these awful images.

Photographs turn current events into historical events. Precisely because photographers operate in the moment, their work has the effect of emphasizing the speed with which the present becomes the past. If this is a paradox, it is one that everybody embraces when they rush to see the photographs of the vacation or the party—to see what they've just experienced reframed as a story. It is surely true that, in order for the full historical record of American terror and abuse in Iraq and Afghanistan to finally be revealed, all the photographs in the possession of the U.S. government will need to be seen. But, even if some of the photographs show us significantly different aspects of what went on, it is unlikely that our understanding will be significantly altered, and, in any event, the fragmentary reports of what these photographs contain do not suggest that major revelations are in store. What we have already seen in the photographs from Abu Ghraib will not be better understood by seeing more photographs, that is for sure. Photography can provide evidence. But people have to make the judgments.

Jed Perl

JOHN FILO/GETTY IMAGES

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Fleeing Moment

A cultural history of desertion.

MICHAEL B. OREN

About 400,000 people, many of them children, annually tour the battlegrounds of Ypres, near the French border in Western Belgium, the scene of some of history's most savage combat. Millions of troops fought here during World War I; more than 600,000 of them died. Sightseers can view the numerous monuments extolling the bravery of the dead or visit the museum named for John McCrae's haunting threnody, "In Flanders Fields." And now, they can see something else, something unusual for a battlefield turned tourist destination—a memorial not to those who fought, but, instead, to those who didn't.

The new monument comprises a single pole, reminiscent of those to which convicted deserters were tied and shot, set in a courtyard outside the cells in which the condemned awaited execution. Roughly 1,000 men on both sides met that fate during the war, killed not for their beliefs—very few were conscientious objectors—but for shirking the burdens of national defense.

In earlier times, such a monument would undoubtedly have sparked outrage from veterans groups. But the Great War's survivors have nearly all died off, and European governments have embraced the memorial. The deserters, French President Nicolas Sarkozy told an Armistice Day ceremony last fall, according to *The New York Times*, "were not dishonored, nor were they cowards," but, rather, had been driven "to the extreme limits of their strength." The British government has gone even further than the Belgians, erecting its own monument to those who were shot and pardoning them posthumously.

What should we make of this practice of immortalizing deserters? Morally speaking, it is a complicated matter. World War I was in many respects a dubious enterprise, and those who desert from unjust wars might correctly be regarded with sympathy. The issue grows murkier, however, when an admiration for deserters from particular wars bleeds into an admiration for desertion as a general practice. There is reason to worry that this is precisely what is happening—to fear that the monuments in Belgium and Britain are symptoms of European attitudes toward not just World War I soldiers but toward *all* soldiers, even those who fight in just causes. And, if that is true, one might well ask: Can a society that valorizes its deserters long survive?

Questions about the Great War's greatness emerged almost as soon as the war was over. They surfaced first in the agonized poems of Wilfred Owen, killed a week before the armistice, and also in the writings of veterans Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, and Erich Maria Remarque. Christopher Nevinson and Otto Dix later exposed the war's horrors on canvas, and Jean Renoir, Abel Gance, and Raymond Bernard portrayed all its senselessness in film. But only with the Second World War was the central moral claim attached to the first—that it would be a "war to end all wars"—finally discredited. Thereafter, World War I in European memory became the unjust war *par excellence*, a metaphor for the irrationality of all modern conflict, if not of modernity itself—"the ultimate origin of the insane contemporary scene," in historian Paul Fussell's description, "where the irony and the absurdity began."

Escaping such madness could hardly be deemed cowardice. On the contrary, it might seem preeminently sober, even heroic. That is the premise of French author Sébastien Japrisot's exhilarating 1991 novel, *A Very Long Engagement*, about five soldiers condemned to death for deliberately wounding themselves in order to escape the trenches, and about one woman's search for their fate. Those who fought were boorish, in Japrisot's telling, even savage, while those who fled were human. His book won the Prix Interallié, one of France's highest literary honors, and was later adapted into a critically celebrated film.

The process of de-glorifying World War I and sanctifying its deserters was not restricted to Europe, however. In the United States, as well, the war had scarcely concluded when artists began stripping away its patina. Two of Hollywood's earliest blockbusters—King Vidor's *Big Parade* (1925) and Raoul Walsh's *What Price Glory?* (1926)—deflated the notion of heroism in the trenches. Similar themes animated *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway's 1929 tragedy, in which the American protagonist shoots one deserter, is nearly executed—unjustly—himself, and then flees the war to Switzerland. As in Europe, World War II served to complete the debunking of its predecessor. American audiences had no difficulty identifying the heroes of Stanley Kubrick's 1957 classic *Paths of Glory*, about four *poilus* arbitrarily accused of cowardice and shot to cover up the French army's shortcomings. By the 1960s and early 1970s, movies set in World War I, such as *Oh, What a Lovely War* and *Johnny Got His Gun*, were being mustered by the anti-war movement to protest the U.S. entanglement in Vietnam.

That conflict, much like the Great War in Europe, prompted many Americans to question generationally held taboos about deserters. Between 1966 and 1973, the Pentagon registered 500,000 cases of desertion, and popular culture in the United States was quick to lionize those who slipped over the Canadian border or who, like Tim O'Brien's spooked grunts in *Going After Cacciato*, simply walked away from the jungle. In time, the dispensation for deserters from World War I and Vietnam would be extended to those who fled from other conflicts widely perceived as immoral. W.P. Inman, protagonist of Charles Frazier's novel *Cold Mountain*, is heroic because he runs away from the Confederacy; Sgt. Brandon King, the focus of Kimberly Peirce's 2008 film *Stop-Loss*, is laudable because he refuses to return to Iraq.

Still, it is difficult to imagine any but the most dovish Americans idolizing a soldier who bolted from the fight to liberate African American slaves—Union soldiers in fact deserted at higher rates than Confederates—or the 6 percent of GIs who deserted in 1944. Stephen Crane's hero, Henry Fleming, abandons the Union Army but later rallies and earns his red badge of courage, as does James Jones's Private Witt, who goes AWOL in the 1962 novel *The Thin Red Line*, only to rejoin his unit and die on Guadalcanal. There are exceptions to this pattern—

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the movie *Patton* (1970) condemned the punishment of soldiers emotionally unsuited for combat during World War II, as did *The Execution of Private Slovik* (1974)—but Americans have generally seemed inclined to draw a distinction between desertion from unjust wars and desertion from just causes.

Is a similar understanding exhibited by Europeans? In contrast to the United States, fortunate to have fought most of its wars overseas, Europe was host to two twentieth-century apocalypses that left it depopulated and permanently traumatized. Torn between ravaging communist and fascist tides, many on the continent came to see war as an inherently no-win, illegitimate endeavor. Consequently, desertion could be conceived as logical, even honorable—and not only from the killing fields of Ypres.

The revulsion to any war, irrespective of its merits, is especially evident today among the European left. Spanish Prime Minister José Zapatero, for example, appointed a self-professed pacifist to head his defense ministry. Meanwhile, German leftist leader Oskar Lafontaine, a former minister of finance, recently accused his nation's army of being "indirectly involved in terrorist actions" for conducting reconnaissance flights in Afghanistan.

Such extreme positions do not characterize the policies of most European governments, several of which are centrist or even right-leaning. But some conservative European politicians are also reluctant to employ military means—even in the service of obviously just efforts, such as keeping peace in the Middle East or standing up to the Taliban. Though empowered by the U.N. Security Council in 2006 to forcibly interdict Hezbollah from rearming and reestablishing its presence close to the Israeli border, the Italian, French, and German forces in Southern Lebanon have ignored their mandate and permitted Hezbollah to increase its stockpile of missiles. That same year, European Union observers fled their posts at a Gaza border crossing rather than confront Palestinian violence. And, in Afghanistan, European NATO members have consistently resisted U.S. requests for additional troops while restricting the scope of their soldiers' operations. Deployed in relatively quiet sectors, German troops can only patrol from inside armored vehicles and cannot leave their bases at night.

For some Europeans, the aversion to military force is insufficient; they want Americans to lay down their arms as well. *The Wall Street Journal* recently profiled U.S. Army Specialist André Shepherd, a deserter living in Germany. Shepherd, with assistance from German peace activists, is seeking to stay in the country under an EU directive offering asylum to soldiers who refuse to fight in illegal wars. The German government has been paying for Shepherd's room and board. "It's just amazing here," he told the *Journal*.

THE CONNECTION between courage and survival has been acknowledged since earliest antiquity, along with the dangers posed by desertion. "When soldiers break and run," warned the *Iliad*'s Agamemnon, "goodbye glory, goodbye all defenses." Beowulf promised an "unpleasant fate, by any measuring of it" to those who abandoned the field, and Buddha, renowned for his placidness, forbade soldiers from deserting, even to become monks. Few leaders understood the problem better than George Washington, who, during the horrendous winter of 1777, feared that "our new Army will scarcely be raised before it will dwindle and waste away" due to unchecked desertion.

Washington stemmed this hemorrhaging by punishing the slackers among his troops, and Americans have never extolled them. Yet the question remains whether Europe's eagerness to immortalize deserters will reverberate elsewhere. It sounds far-fetched, but it is impossible not to wonder: Will visitors to Valley Forge someday see a single pole?

MICHAEL B. OREN

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A group of French soldiers deserts by fleeing toward German lines in 1917.

GENERAL PHOTOGRAPHIC AGENCY/GETTY IMAGES

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Power Struggle

Do we need a technological breakthrough to avert the climate crisis?

BRADFORD PLUMER

In the winter of 1984, a young scientist named Steven Chu was working as the new head of the quantum electronics division at AT&T's Bell Labs in Holmdel, New Jersey. For months, he'd been struggling to find ways to trap atoms with light so that he could hold them in place and study them better. It was an idea he'd picked up from an older colleague, Arthur Ashkin, who had wrangled with the problem all through the 1970s before finally being told to shut the project down—which he did, until Chu came along. ("I was this new, young person who he could corrupt," Chu later joked.) Now Chu, too, had hit an impasse until, one night, a fierce snowstorm swirled through New Jersey. Everyone at Bell had left early except for Chu, who lived nearby and decided to stay a bit longer. As he watched the snow drift outside, he realized they'd been approaching the problem incorrectly: He first needed to cool the atoms, so that they were moving only as fast as ants, rather than fighter jets; only *then* could he predict their movements and trap them with lasers. It was a key insight, and Chu's subsequent work on cooling atoms eventually earned him a share of the Nobel Prize in physics.

While it may sound inevitable in retrospect, big breakthroughs like that don't come along too often. Nowadays, though, Chu is betting that they will—and must. As the U.S. energy secretary, Chu has been tasked with reshaping the country's trillion-dollar energy economy, to reduce America's reliance on fossil fuels and cut greenhouse-gas emissions 80 percent or more by mid-century—essential to avoiding catastrophic climate change. It's an enormous goal, and Chu believes the only way to achieve it is with multiple Nobel-caliber leaps in energy technology. "I mean technology that is game-changing, as opposed to merely incremental," he told Congress in March—technology that, as a recent Department of Energy (DOE) task force described it, will require an understanding of basic physics and chemistry "beyond our present reach."

Not everyone agrees that the fate of the planet hinges on such far-reaching advances. Given the increasingly dire revelations of climate science—greenhouse-gas emissions are rising more quickly than projected, Arctic sea ice is melting faster than once thought possible—many analysts believe we need to act with all due haste, before the planet hits a tipping point. And much of the green movement tends to follow Al Gore's oft-stated assurance that, "to save the future, we have

PAUL SOUDERS/WORLDFOTO/AURORA PHOTOS

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everything we need except the political will." Chu's view also sits uneasily alongside that of the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which, in 2007, declared that stabilizing carbon in the atmosphere below safe levels could be done with a mix of technologies that were either currently available (like wind power) or just around the bend (plug-in hybrids, for instance). This camp argues that, while existing clean-energy gadgets may have flaws, they'll get steadily better and cheaper as they're deployed, and, in any case, the immense urgency of the climate problem leaves us little alternative.

Chu, for his part, acknowledges that the threat posed by global warming requires a wide array of practical and immediate responses, including a cap on carbon emissions to make fossil fuels less competitive. Still, according to those familiar with his thinking, Chu sees the challenge of spurring breakthroughs in energy research as an even larger priority than setting a carbon price and promoting existing clean-energy sources. "I think science and technology can generate much better choices," he told *The New York Times* in February. "It has, consistently, over hundreds and hundreds of years."

It's an attractive vision. There's no question, after all, that investments in energy R&D have become dangerously anemic over the years, and that better technology would make the task of curbing emissions far less arduous. But Chu's stance raises plenty of knotty questions. What's the best way to promote innovation? And can these vast leaps in scientific understanding arrive in time to fend off rising global temperatures? And, most importantly, what happens if they don't? As it turns out, there's reason to worry that counting on radical breakthroughs to save the planet may be a fraught and uncertain venture.

Talk to chemists and physicists toiling on the frontiers of clean-energy research and it's easy to be dazzled by the possibilities. Take solar power. The sun radiates more energy down to Earth in an hour than humans use in a year. It's just that, right now, even the best solar photovoltaic panels are relatively inefficient at harvesting that resource—and storing the energy for when the sun isn't shining remains tricky. So, some scientists have gone back to the drawing board and tried to pursue artificial photosynthesis, mimicking the deft process that plants use to turn sunlight and water into fuel.

Progress has been slow, but, in 2008, Daniel Nocera, a chemist at MIT, made headlines for a breakthrough in one small piece of this project. He created a cheap chemical catalyst that could use solar energy to break down water into oxygen and hydrogen, which could then be stored or run through a fuel cell to generate electricity. "In theory, if you could use the sun's energy to convert just one-third of the amount of water in an Olympic-sized swimming pool into hydrogen and oxygen per second, you could take care of the world's energy needs," Nocera explains. At the time it was announced, one researcher called it "probably the most important single discovery of the century" for solar power, and the news conjured up shiny visions of leaf-like catalysts creating hydrogen fuel to power homes and cars—provided, of course, that a flurry of follow-up problems could be resolved: how to absorb sunlight more efficiently, how to build the fuel cells, how to store the hydrogen cheaply, and so on. Those hurdles are formidable, and Nocera has his fair share of doubters, but the broad concept is undeniably appealing.

✳ *For more on the Politics of saving the environment, check out Bradford Plumer on* **THE VINE** *at www.tnr.com*

Over the past few years, the DOE's Office of Basic Energy Sciences has released a series of reports that have taken such "if only…" notions quite seriously. The premise of these reports is that existing clean-energy technologies—from batteries to nuclear power—have hit ceilings that can't be surpassed by engineering alone or by the tinkering that private companies are now doing at the margins. In many cases, cracking these limits will require dramatic strides in scientific understanding. "Companies are doing great work, but it's all been based on an existing set of basic concepts and understandings to which we need to continue to add," says Mark Ratner, a chemist at Northwestern University who contributed to the DOE reports.

These next-level breakthroughs may, in effect, require a whole new type of science. Ratner explains that, during the twentieth century, scientists became increasingly sophisticated at studying quantum effects and examining matter at an ever-smaller scale—leading to the discovery of key materials such as superconductors and carbon nanotubes. Now, he says, the big challenge is to step beyond observation and figure out how to actually control and direct matter and energy at the atomic level. "We still don't really know how to control chemical reactions at that level, for instance," he says. "Something like that could really deepen what we could do."

Last December, the office released an "energy challenges" report that offered a lavish vision of what a new "control science" could accomplish. If, for instance, the steel used to make nuclear reactors was built by manipulating atoms at the nanoscale, rather than through traditional bulk processes, we could have materials that self-heal and better resist chemical corrosion and intense radiation, allowing the construction of nuclear reactors that operate at much higher temperatures and efficiencies—meaning more power and less waste. Or ultra-light materials could be used to build cars that require far less energy to propel. Or batteries built on chemistry yet unknown could allow electric vehicles to vastly surpass their currently limited range. Or solid-state lighting that used just a fraction of the power that incandescent light bulbs use, and without the glare of compact fluorescent lights, could drop the percentage of electricity the nation needs for lighting from 22 to 2 percent.

While the DOE reports were drafted during the Bush years—conservatives have often touted technological upheaval as the solution to climate change, but mainly as an excuse to put off carbon regulations—the findings have particularly resonated with Chu, who has long agreed that deep research and disruptive new technologies are necessary for solving our energy woes. With funds pouring in from the Obama administration, the DOE's labs are beginning to channel their basic research efforts toward specific energy problems, both big and small. "There's always a question of how much you focus on engineering and how much on targeted, basic research," says George Crabtree, a scientist at Argonne National Laboratory who helped oversee the DOE reports. "It's dangerous to say this, because I love engineering—the plug-in hybrid, that was engineering. But we need to shift back a bit to the basic sciences side."

As alluring as this scientific vision may be, we may not have time to wait for radical advances to emerge. Global warming is happening now, and many of the changes needed to slow or stop it will have to be made in the next few decades. According to the IPCC, wealthy countries need to cut their carbon-dioxide emissions by up to 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2020, and by more than 80 percent by 2050, in order to have a shot at stabilizing atmospheric

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carbon levels below 450 parts per million. Skate past that number and we run a high risk of triggering carbon-cycle feedbacks beyond our control, putting the world on course for massive sea-level rises, widespread drought, and other assorted horrors.

"We need to replace the entire energy system in three or four decades," says Joseph Romm, a Clinton-era Energy Department official and one of the fiercest critics of those banking on major technological breakthroughs. "The notion that technology that doesn't even *exist* yet could be invented, demonstrated, and then commercialized in that time frame—it's absurd."

Indeed, the question of timing turns out to be utterly central. Chu is mindful of this: In addition to his longer-term vision, he has put an emphasis on intermediate advances that can scale up in just five to ten years with proper support—from improved batteries to sensor-based technology to cut energy use in buildings. Yet many of the truly sweeping breakthroughs envisioned by the DOE task force could take far longer, and the energy industry tends to evolve at a sluggish pace, with major new discoveries often taking decades to filter into the marketplace.

Consider, for instance, the high-temperature superconductor. In 1986, two researchers at IBM's labs in Zurich, Alex Müller and Georg Bednorz, announced that they had discovered a new brittle ceramic compound that could conduct electricity with little resistance at relatively high temperatures (previous superconductors needed to be cooled with expensive liquid helium, making them impractical for most uses except boutique applications, such as MRIs and particle accelerators). Condensed-matter physicists everywhere swooned over the news. The press giddied itself over a "Jetsons"-esque future replete with magnetically levitated trains, ultrafast computers, and new transmission lines that could carry five times as much electricity as normal lines over long distances with low losses—a true game-changer for electricity markets. "That summer, I made a lot of money as a consultant," chuckles Bruce Strauss, a high-energy physicist who now works for DOE. "You saw venture capitalists running around with open checkbooks, asking, 'Where should I invest?' I kept telling them you're not going to see real applications for twenty or thirty years—they looked at me like I was a doomsayer." Sure enough, more than 20 years later, those transmission lines are still in the embryonic stage. The superconductors perform admirably in demonstration projects, but no one has mastered a way to bring production costs down to halfway reasonable levels.

While counterexamples exist, some analysts warn that the superconductor case is all too illustrative. Romm cites a 2001 study by Royal Dutch/Shell Group, which found that, historically, "it has taken 25 years after commercial introduction for a primary energy form to obtain a 1 percent share of the global market." Silicon solar photovoltaic cells, for instance, ranked as a major advance when they were developed more than half a century ago, yet they still provide less than 0.1 percent of America's electricity today. How much longer might it take for even more complex inventions—artificial photosynthesis, say—to journey from the laboratory out into widespread use? (Even Chu recognizes that some inventions may not emerge in a reasonable time frame: He recently cut federal support for hydrogen-powered cars, arguing that widely deploying these vehicles in the next few decades would require "four significant technological breakthroughs"—too improbable for even the most fervent believers in science.)

There may be an even more basic problem, too: Science has to continue rapidly advancing—or even speed up—for many of these big breakthroughs to occur in the first place. Last year's DOE report argued that achieving its futuristic vision would require significantly *increasing* the rate of scientific discovery, in part because, as the materials and phenomena under study get more complex, entirely new scientific laws often need to be grasped at each step of the way. "Look at superconductivity," explains Graham Fleming, a chemist at the University of California, Berkeley who contributed to the DOE reports. "It's got what's called an emergent property—just knowing the properties of the parts doesn't help a lot. Having a better theoretical understanding of those emergent systems is something we need. Right now there's an awful lot of trial and error in making materials that are much more efficient and effective."

So what are the odds that the pace of scientific discovery can accelerate? This is a hotly debated topic, with a wide spectrum of answers. In 2005, Jonathan Huebner, a physicist working at Pentagon's Naval Air Warfare Center in China Lake, California, published a controversial paper looking at the rate of U.S. patents awarded over time. He argued that the rate of technological innovation has actually been slowing since around 1873—the age of Edison—and that the world could be entering a new Dark Age of innovation by the 2020s. Huebner's paper came under heavy fire from a number of innovation scholars, including Ray Kurzweil, a futurist who is inordinately bullish on the rate of technological progress and who, to his credit, has made a number of bang-on forecasts. (He famously predicted that a computer would be able to beat a grandmaster in chess by the late 1990s.) Kurzweil has suggested that technological change will continue zooming forward until artificial-intelligence machines start replicating themselves. At that point—in or around 2045—the pace of innovation will happen so blindingly fast as to be inconceivable. Presumably the answer to our carbon troubles would materialize, as if by magic, at this point.

Most scientists, though, tend to sit in the middle: optimistic that science and technology will continue to push ahead, but not gambling on any particular game-changer. "You can't make those predictions," says Jae Edmonds, a scientist at the Joint Global Change Research Institute in College Park, Maryland. "What I do know is that you increase the likelihood of getting breakthroughs if you both invest in the underlying science and have policies that signal a limit on emissions. If you do that, it's reasonable to expect the technology to come."

That brings up another big question mark: Is there anything the government can do to quicken the pace of innovation, and convert those laboratory insights into commercial reality more swiftly? It's easy to point to the Manhattan Project or Apollo Program as examples where the government faced a seemingly intractable scientific problem, opened its checkbook, unleashed the nation's brightest minds, and watched the obstacles melt away. But that analogy is inapt. Michael Oppenheimer, a geoscientist at Princeton, has pointed out that the Manhattan Project was set up to create a unique product for a single customer—the U.S. government—for whom money was no object. The government can't pursue the same strategy with energy, because price is a pivotal concern.

On this score, the government's record is murkier. Regulations like the Clean Air Act and fuel-economy standards have helped prod private companies to innovate, but shepherding major scientific advances from birth to commercial readiness is another matter entirely, and a difficult task. "It's a complicated, messy, recursive process," says Robert Fri, a former Environmental Protection Agency official who now works at the think tank Resources for the Future. "That's not al-

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ways the way the government goes about doing stuff." Fri points to the Energy Department's synthetic fuels program in the 1970s, which struggled to invent a viable alternative to oil and fell apart when the price of crude sank back down. To be sure, Chu is aggressively pursuing new ways for the Energy Department to bridge this gap between basic science and the marketplace. He has read, among other things, a recent Brookings report arguing for closer collaboration among DOE's national labs, universities, and private industry, and he is trying to retool the Energy Department along similar lines. Those efforts are promising, but the results remain to be seen.

That doesn't mean it's time to despair. It may be difficult to translate Nobel-caliber insights into everyday household gadgets. But there's another job that the government *has* been fairly good at doing over the years: supporting technologies that are already viable but, for whatever reason, face barriers to gaining a toehold in the real world. "Historically, when the government has thought through what those barriers were, and targeted that barrier quite precisely, it could have a terrific positive impact," says Fri. In the 1970s, he notes, Energy Department labs realized that using electronic ballasts in fluorescent light bulbs could make the bulbs vastly more energy-efficient. The big roadblock was that, at the time, two ballast manufacturers dominated the market, and neither had any incentive to adopt the new technology, since if one did, the other would quickly follow, and no one would gain any market advantage—they'd just have spent a bit more money. So the Energy Department seeded a few small start-up firms that demonstrated the ballasts and prompted the bigger companies to follow suit, leading to large savings for the public.

These deployment strategies, it turns out, can spur another type of innovation—marketplace learning—which can sometimes be just as crucial as cutting-edge scientific research. "There are three ways of lowering the cost of something," explains Romm. "There's a major technological advance; there are economies of scale; and then there's what's called the experience learning curve. The third one is arguably the most important—as you deploy stuff, you realize what needs to be improved. Where the stress fractures in a wind turbine are. How the mirrors [of a solar thermal plant] perform in a desert after a few months. Or in manufacturing—how you use silicon more efficiently, or make it thinner, or recycle it. None of this is Nobel-caliber." As existing technologies like wind turbines become more widely used, performance steadily improves, incremental research gets adopted, and the costs start falling—a process that can be more reliable than waiting for breathtaking new scientific advances. Studies of wind turbines, for example, have found that costs come down by as much as 17 percent each time production doubles, as a result of learning-by-doing.

That's a good thing, because it's this sort of incremental innovation that the planet may need to lean on most heavily, at least in the near term. A substantial body of evidence suggests that the world can make huge emission cuts in the next few decades without needing to wait for grandiose new technologies to arrive. In 2004, two Princeton scientists, Stephen Pacala and Robert Socolow, published a much-discussed paper in *Science* laying out 15 carbon-cutting strategies that have already been field-tested, which they dubbed "wedges." Solar power constituted one wedge, nuclear another, stricter fuel-economy standards for cars a third, reversing deforestation a fourth, and so on. The world, Pacala and Socolow showed, could cut emissions dramatically and still satisfy growing energy demand by deploying just seven of those wedges on a grand scale. (That's no mean task: One "wedge" of nuclear power, say, would mean building 21 new plants each year between now and 2050.) While some experts now believe we need even more wedges to meet the IPCC targets, several research efforts have reached similar conclusions: By combining everything we now have on hand, we can tackle a sizeable chunk of the problem at a reasonable cost. A 2008 McKinsey Global Institute analysis pegged the investments needed by 2030 at around 0.6 to 1.4 percent of global GDP and noted that the impact on the world's economic growth rate would be minimal, "even with currently known technologies."

The IPCC lists a wide array of technologies either available now or very likely to surface in the near future that could help reduce emissions. The former category includes (among other things) nuclear power, hydropower, wind power, geothermal, fuel-efficient vehicles, hybrids, biofuels, public transit, reforestation, and landfill methane recovery. The list of just-around-the-corner strategies includes carbon sequestration for coal-fired plants, advanced nuclear plants, tidal and wave power, cellulosic biofuels, and advanced electric vehicles. While no single solution will make more than a modest dent in the world's emissions—none of those items has the vast potential of, say, artificial photosynthesis—when combined together, they should steadily chip away at carbon emissions.

One particularly promising example is solar thermal power, in which large arrays of mirrors heat a liquid that can either generate electricity or be stored for when it's cloudy or dark. Such plants are being built now, and, if Congress passed a carbon price that made them more competitive with coal and natural-gas plants, they'd become even more prevalent and the price would continue nudging downward: The National Renewable Energy Laboratory has already estimated that these plants will be able to compete with existing natural-gas plants by 2015, and solar-power expert Ken Zweibel has estimated that they could, in theory, supply up to 69 percent of America's electricity by 2050. It would require a fair amount of government support and infrastructure investments, as well as further R&D, but not a whole new level of science. In the short term, meanwhile, one of the biggest reductions in emissions will come from making buildings and homes more energy-efficient, which typically requires no fancy new technology at all—just smarter regulations.

It's true that, eventually, existing technologies will hit a wall. If electric cars powered by lithium-ion batteries become widespread, for instance, then world lithium supplies could conceivably dwindle. Or, at a certain point, the need for cost-effective electrical-power storage could become a serious issue. (Right now, Denmark gets nearly 20 percent of its electricity from wind, but can only "store" that power by exporting the excess to Sweden and Norway, which send back hydropower when the wind isn't blowing—a clever workaround that will prove less feasible as renewables spread.) "There are a bunch of things we know how to do now, and we want to use all the incentives we can to get those things out there," says Argonne's George Crabtree. "But, eventually, their impact will saturate, as soon as they're fully deployed—and that's where you'll need serious innovation."

By mid-century or so, we really may need the sorts of artificial leaves and futuristic batteries we can barely begin to imagine right now. And it is far less outlandish to expect that, by that time, science will be able to deliver such breakthroughs. But all of those sci-fi technologies decades from now won't mean much if we've long since blown past our carbon budget. That means doing as much as we can now—and fast. ◆

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Spent

America after consumerism.

AMITAI ETZIONI

Much of the debate over how to address the economic crisis has focused on a single word: regulation. And it's easy to understand why. Bad behavior by a variety of businesses landed us in this mess—so it seems rather obvious that the way to avoid future economic meltdowns is to create, and vigorously enforce, new rules proscribing such behavior. But the truth is quite a bit more complicated. The world economy consists of billions of transactions every day. There can never be enough inspectors, accountants, customs officers, and police to ensure that all or even most of these transactions are properly carried out. Moreover, those charged with enforcing regulations are themselves not immune to corruption, and, hence, they too must be supervised and held accountable to others—who also have to be somehow regulated. The upshot is that regulation cannot be the linchpin of attempts to reform our economy. What is needed instead is something far more sweeping: for people to internalize a different sense of how one ought to behave, and act on it because they believe it is right.

That may sound far-fetched. It is commonly believed that people conduct themselves in a moral manner mainly because they fear the punishment that will be meted out if they engage in anti-social behavior. But this position does not stand up to close inspection. Most areas of behavior are extralegal; we frequently do what is expected because we care or love. This is evident in the ways we attend to our children (beyond a very low requirement set by law), treat our spouses, do volunteer work, and participate in public life. What's more, in many of those areas that *are* covered by law, the likelihood of being caught is actually quite low, and the penalties are often surprisingly mild. For instance, only about one in 100 tax returns gets audited, and most cheaters are merely asked to pay back what they "missed," plus some interest. Nevertheless, most Americans pay the taxes due. Alan Lewis's classic study *The Psychology of Taxation* concluded that people don't just pay taxes because they fear the government; they do it because they consider the burden fairly shared and the monies legitimately spent. In short, the normative values of a culture matter. Regulation is needed when culture fails, but it cannot alone serve as the mainstay of good conduct.

So what kind of transformation in our normative culture is called for? What needs to be eradicated, or at least greatly tempered, is consumerism: the obsession with acquisition that has become the organizing principle of American life. This is not the same thing as capitalism, nor is it the same thing as consumption. To explain the difference, it is useful to draw on Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of human needs. At the bottom of this hierarchy are basic creature comforts; once these are sated, more satisfaction is drawn from affection, self-esteem, and, finally, self-actualization. As long as consumption is focused on satisfying basic human needs—safety, shelter, food, clothing, health care, education—it is not consumerism. But, when the acquisition of goods and services is used to satisfy the higher needs, consumption turns into consumerism—and consumerism becomes a social disease.

The link to the economic crisis should be obvious. A culture in which the urge to consume dominates the psychology of citizens is a culture in which people will do most anything to acquire the means to consume—working slavish hours, behaving rapaciously in their business pursuits, and even bending the rules in order to maximize their earnings. They will also buy homes beyond their means and think nothing of running up credit-card debt. It therefore seems safe to say that consumerism is, as much as anything else, responsible for the current economic mess. But it is not enough to establish that which people ought not to do, to end the obsession with making and consuming evermore than the next person. Consumerism will not just magically disappear from its central place in our culture. It needs to be supplanted by *something*.

A shift away from consumerism, and toward this something else, would obviously be a dramatic change for American society. But such grand cultural changes are far from unprecedented. Profound transformations in the definition of "the good life" have occurred throughout human history. Before the spirit of capitalism swept across much of the world, neither work nor commerce were highly valued pursuits—indeed, they were often delegated to scorned minorities such as Jews. For centuries in aristocratic Europe and Japan, making war was a highly admired profession. In China, philosophy, poetry, and brush painting were respected during the heyday of the literati. Religion was once the dominant source of normative culture; then, following the Enlightenment, secular humanism was viewed in some parts of the world as the foundation of society. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the influence of religious values in places like Russia and, of course, the Middle East. (Details can be found in John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge's new book, *God is Back*—although, for many, he never left.) It is true that not all these changes have elevated the human condition. The point is merely that such change, especially during times of crisis, is possible.

To accomplish this kind of radical change, it is neither necessary nor desirable to imitate devotees of the 1960s counterculture, early socialists, or followers of ascetic religious orders, all of whom have resisted consumerism by rejecting the whole capitalist project. On the contrary, capitalism should be allowed to thrive, albeit within clear and well-enforced limits. This position does not call for a life of sackcloth and ashes, nor of altruism. And it does not call on poor people or poor nations to be content with their fate and learn to love their misery; clearly, the capitalist economy must be strong enough to provide for the basic creature comforts of all people. But it does call for a new balance between consumption and other human pursuits.

There is strong evidence that when consumption is used to try to address higher needs—that is, needs beyond basic

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creature comforts—it is ultimately Sisyphean. Several studies have shown that, across many nations with annual incomes above $20,000, there is no correlation between increased income and increased happiness. In the United States since World War II, per capita income has tripled, but levels of life satisfaction remain about the same, while the people of Japan, despite experiencing a sixfold increase in income since 1958, have seen their levels of contentment stay largely stagnant. Studies also indicate that many members of capitalist societies feel unsatisfied, if not outright deprived, however much they earn and consume, because others make and spend even more: Relative rather than absolute deprivation is what counts. This is a problem since, by definition, most people cannot consume more than most others. True, it is sometimes hard to tell a basic good from a status good, and a status good can turn into a basic one (air conditioning, for instance). However, it is not a matter of cultural snobbery to note that no one *needs* inflatable Santas or plastic flamingos on their front lawn or, for that matter, lawns that are strikingly green even in the scorching heat of summer. No one needs a flat-screen television, not to mention diamonds as a token of love or a master's painting as a source of self-esteem.

Consumerism, it must be noted, afflicts not merely the upper class in affluent societies but also the middle class and many in the working class. Large numbers of people across society believe that they work merely to make ends meet, but an examination of their shopping lists and closets reveals that they spend good parts of their income on status goods such as brand-name clothing, the "right" kind of car, and other assorted items that they don't really need.

This mentality may seem so integral to American culture that resisting it is doomed to futility. But the current economic downturn may provide an opening of sorts. The crisis has caused people to spend less on luxury goods, such as diamonds and flashy cars; scale back on lavish celebrations for holidays, birthdays, weddings, and bar mitzvahs; and agree to caps on executive compensation. Some workers have accepted fewer hours, lower salaries, and unpaid furloughs.

So far, much of this scaling-back has been involuntary, the result of economic necessity. What is needed next is to help people realize that limiting consumption is not a reflection of failure. Rather, it represents liberation from an obsession—a chance to abandon consumerism and focus on . . . well, what exactly? What should replace the worship of consumer goods?

The kind of culture that would best serve a Maslowian hierarchy of needs is hardly one that would kill the goose that lays the golden eggs—the economy that can provide the goods needed for basic creature comforts. Nor one that merely mocks the use of consumer goods to respond to higher needs. It must be a culture that extols sources of human flourishing besides acquisition. The two most obvious candidates to fill this role are communitarian pursuits and transcendental ones.

Communitarianism refers to investing time and energy in relations with the other, including family, friends, and members of one's community. The term also encompasses service to the common good, such as volunteering, national service, and politics. Communitarian life is not centered around altruism but around mutuality, in the sense that deeper and thicker involvement with the other is rewarding to both the recipient and the giver. Indeed, numerous studies show that communitarian pursuits breed deep contentment. A study of 50-year-old men shows that those with friendships are far less likely to experience heart disease. Another shows that life satisfaction in older adults is higher for those who participate in community service.

Transcendental pursuits refer to spiritual activities broadly understood, including religious, contemplative, and artistic ones. The lifestyle of the Chinese literati, centered around poetry, philosophy, and brush painting, was a case in point, but a limited one because this lifestyle was practiced by an elite social stratum and based in part on exploitation of other groups. In modern society, transcendental pursuits have often been emphasized by bohemians, beginning artists, and others involved in lifelong learning who consume modestly. Here again, however, these people make up only a small fraction of society. Clearly, for a culture to buy out of consumerism and move to satisfying higher human needs with transcendental projects, the option to participate in these pursuits must be available on a wider scale.

All this may seem abstract, not to mention utopian. But one can see a precedent of sorts for a society that emphasizes communitarian and transcendental pursuits among retired people, who spend the final decades of their lives painting not for a market or galleries but as a form of self-expression, socializing with each other, volunteering, and, in some cases, taking classes. Of course, these citizens already put in the work that enables them to lead this kind of life. For other ages to participate before retirement, they will have to shorten their workweek and workday, refuse to take work home, turn off their BlackBerrys, and otherwise downgrade the centrality of labor to their lives. This is, in effect, what the French, with their 35-hour workweeks, tried to do, as did other countries in "old" Europe. Mainstream American economists—who argue that a modern economy cannot survive unless people consume evermore and hence produce and work evermore—have long scoffed at these societies and urged them to modernize. To some extent, they did, especially the Brits. Now it seems that maybe these countries were onto something after all.

A society that downplayed consumerism in favor of other organizing principles would not just limit the threat of economic meltdown and feature a generally happier populace; it would have other advantages as well. Such a society would, for example, use fewer material resources and, therefore, be much more compatible with protecting the environment. It would also exhibit higher levels of social justice.

Social justice entails redistribution of wealth, taking from those disproportionally endowed and giving to those who are underprivileged through no fault of their own—for reasons ranging from past injustices and their lingering contemporary effects to technological changes to globalization to genetic differences. The reason these redistributions have been surprisingly limited in free societies is that those who command the "extra" assets tend also to be those who are politically powerful. Promoting social justice by organizing those with less and forcing those in power to yield has had limited success in democratic countries and led to massive bloodshed in others. So the question arises: Are there other ways to reduce the resistance of elites to redistribution?

The answer is found when elites derive their main source of contentment not from acquiring more goods and services, but from activities that are neither labor nor capital intensive and, hence, do not require great amounts of money. Communitarian activities require social skills and communication skills as well

ANTHONY RUSSO

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as time and personal energy—but, as a rule, minimal material or financial outlays. The same holds for transcendental activities such as prayer, meditation, music, art, sports, adult education, and so on. True, consumerism has turned many of these pursuits into expensive endeavors. But one can break out of this mentality and find that it is possible to engage in most transcendental activities quite profoundly using minimal goods and services. One does not need designer clothes to enjoy the sunset or shoes with fancy labels to benefit from a hike. Chess played with plastic pieces is the same game as the one played with carved mahogany or marble pieces. And I'm quite sure that the Lord does not listen better to prayers read from a leather-bound Bible than those read from a plain one, printed on recycled paper. (Among several books that depict how this kind of culture can flourish is *Seven Pleasures* by Willard Spiegelman.) In short, those who embrace this lifestyle will find that they can achieve a high level of contentment even if they give up a considerable segment of the surplus wealth they command.

As for actually putting this vision into practice: The main way societies will determine whether the current crisis will serve as an event that leads to cultural transformation or merely constitute an interlude in the consumerism project is through a process I call "moral megalogues." Societies are constantly engaged in mass dialogues over what is right and wrong. Typically, only one or two topics dominate these megalogues at any given time. Key recent issues have included the legitimacy of the 2003 invasion of Iraq and whether gay couples should be allowed to marry. In earlier decades, women's rights and minority rights were topics of such discussions. Megalogues involve millions of members of a society exchanging views with one another at workplaces, during family gatherings, in the media, and at public events. They are often contentious and passionate, and, while they have no clear beginning or endpoint, they tend to lead to changes in a society's culture and its members' behavior.

The megalogue about the relationship between consumerism and human flourishing is now flickering but has yet to become a leading topic—like regulation. Public intellectuals, pundits, and politicians are those best-positioned to focus a megalogue on this subject and, above all, to set the proper scope for the discussion. The main challenge is not to pass some laws, but, rather, to ask people to reconsider what a good life entails.

Having a national conversation about this admittedly abstract question is merely a start, though. If a new shared understanding surrounding consumption is to evolve, education will have a crucial role to play. Schools, which often claim to focus solely on academics, are actually major avenues through which changes in societal values are fostered. For instance, many schools deeply impress on young children that they ought to respect the environment, not discriminate on racial or ethnic grounds, and resolve differences in a peaceful manner. There is no reason these schools cannot push back against consumerism while promoting communitarian and transcendental values as well. School uniforms (to counter conspicuous consumption) and an emphasis on community service are just two ways to work these ideas into the culture of public education.

For adults, changes in the workplace could go a long way toward promoting these values. Limits on overtime, except under special conditions (such as natural disasters); shorter workweeks; more part- and flex-time jobs; increased freedom to work from home; allowing employees to dress down and thereby avoid squandering money on suits and other expensive clothes—all these relatively small initiatives would encourage Americans to spend more time on things besides work.

Finally, legislation has a role to play. Taxes can discourage the purchase of ever-larger houses, cause people to favor public transportation over cars, and encourage the use of commercial aviation rather than private jets. Government could also strike a blow against consumerism by instituting caps on executive pay.

Is all this an idle, abstract hypothesis? Not necessarily. Plenty of religious Americans have already embraced versions of these values to some extent or other. And those whose secular beliefs lead them to community service are in the same boat. One such idealist named Barack Obama chose to be a community organizer in Chicago rather than pursue a more lucrative career.

I certainly do not expect that most people will move away from a consumerist mindset overnight. Some may keep one foot in the old value system even as they test the waters of the new one, just like those who wear a blazer with jeans. Still others may merely cut back on conspicuous consumption without guilt or fear of social censure. Societies shift direction gradually. All that is needed is for more and more people to turn the current economic crisis into a liberation from the obsession with consumer goods and the uberwork it requires—and, bit by bit, begin to rethink their definition of what it means to live a good life. ◆

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

CHANGES

The French writer-director Olivier Assayas, experienced and versatile, is now defiant. He certainly knows that one of the most frequently recurrent film themes is social change. Still, he bravely engages this familiar theme in his new film, *Summer Hours*. Well, we can be glad that he did. It was said of Arturo Toscanini that when he conducted a familiar piece—say, Beethoven's Fifth—he made it a world premiere. I burden Assayas with this large Toscanini comparison because *Summer Hours* makes us forget that we have been here before. The idea seems fresh.

Some children and adolescents come trooping through a field toward a large house. They are the grandchildren of Hélène Berthier, who is seventy-five. In the house, besides Hélène, are her son Frédéric (with wife), his younger brother Jérémie (with wife), and his sister Adrienne. This house was once the home of a famous painter, Hélène's uncle. The extraordinary furnishings, including two Corot canvases, were the uncle's acquisitions.

Hélène is a poised woman, conscious of both her age and her responsibility for the lovely things in this house. She tells Frédéric that the Musée d'Orsay has already shown interest in the Corots and some of the furniture, which was made by masters. She wants him to be careful of the house and these things after she is gone. Frédéric of course tells her that it is too soon for her to worry about such matters, and she of course dies within a few months.

Most of the film is set in Paris apartments: houses belong in the country, in the past of these people. The heirs have to decide what to do with the legacy that is coming their way, including the house. Frédéric is an economist in Paris; Jérémie is a business man who works in China; Adrienne, unmarried, is a designer who works in New York. One of Assayas's niceties is that these conversations are not material squabbles: they are sharp but smooth dramatizations of changes toward family, toward continuances—toward the family's house, for prime instance. The tugs of contemporary life, in money and in social patterns, are deployed by Assayas for insights and abutments. No one is right or wrong: everyone comes out right but a bit bruised.

Pertinent as it all is, we might begin to feel that this film about social change is not paying enough attention to changes for younger people. That kind of change then implodes. Sylvie, Frédéric's teenage daughter, is arrested on a drug charge. He goes to the police station to see the relevant detective. The detective is not the usual veteran cop: he is young, bearded, easy. He wants to get rid of the case because it is only a small amount of drugs and there is too much paperwork involved. When the trouble is settled and Frédéric drives Sylvie home, he reproves her, and she notes that he smokes pot, too. His reply is that at least he doesn't get caught. He also learns during the drive something that doesn't surprise him: she has a boyfriend with whom she is sexually active.

The Corots are sold—two paintings cannot be divided among three heirs—and so is the house, since two of the heirs live abroad and Frédéric does not want to use it much. The family also must part with their country servant, Éloïse, who has loved them for years and whom they treat generously. (Another cheer for Assayas: he makes the loyal-old-servant cliché fresh by underplaying it, leaving the tears up to us.)

In the last weekend before new owners take over the house, Frédéric allows Sylvie to give a party there. (The place is almost unfurnished by now.) The teenagers pour in with music and booze. In the last scene Sylvie and her boyfriend are in the field where the film began. She feels that she is on the cusp of time. The field and the house have been deeply important to her, yet she is glad to be entering an age that is free of them.

SUMMER HOURS
IFC Films

BURMA VJ: REPORTING FROM A CLOSED COUNTRY
Oscilloscope

Assayas is not lamenting social change. He recognizes that for at least two centuries every new generation has looked worrisome to its forebears, every old generation has looked dusty to the young. He views this family's transition as historically typical. *Summer Hours* has a sense of flow, rather than decline.

The actors crown the film with their talents. Edith Scob, in the brief role of the poised matriarch, is quietly proud. Charles Berling as Frédéric is, as intended, just another man, likable and pitiable. Juliette Binoche, blonde for a change, is pert as Adrienne; Jérémie Renier, as Jérémie, makes his excuses credibly. Alice de Lencquesaing is Sylvie, the teenager we all know and are obliged to understand.

As writer, Assayas knows how to elide. He never trudges through trite scenes that other writers might think necessary. At the end of the first sequence, we see Hélène's family leave her house; in the next sequence in Paris, an unspecified time later, Frédéric happens to mention something that happened after Hélène's death. We have been spared the deathbed, the funeral, and so on. Later, we suddenly

ANTHONY RUSSO

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see Frédéric in the detective's office discussing Sylvie's drug arrest. All the mere data—the discovery of Sylvie's pot, the arrest, the call to her father, all things we can immediately infer—are omitted. (Hitchcock once said that film is life with the boring bits left out.)

But what Assayas concentrates on he directs with distinction. Movement, of characters and camera, is crucial to him. Even in a room, we seem always to be traveling forward. A small touch shows his impatience with stasis: when the two brothers have coffee in a café, Assayas has one of them go to the counter and order the coffee rather than wait for a waiter. In the scenes where the siblings discuss their differences, he uses his camera in a mood of curiosity rather than explication. He makes us want to hear. Some silent moments speak, too. At the end of the opening section, Hélène bids goodbye to her family outside her house. The cars leave. Then she turns, faces the now-empty house, and walks slowly up the steps. She seems to be accepting the passage of time, even accepting mortality. It is simple and beautiful. Near the end, old Éloïse, the servant, comes to look at the house after it is sold, denuded, and locked. She looks in the windows, particularly at the kitchen where she spent so many of her years. She says nothing, she does nothing. She just looks in for a bit. With touches like these, Assayas makes the house itself a character moving from one era to another.

Has photography affected history? When a historian sits down to write about an event that happened after the invention of the camera, do the pictures that he knows affect his writing about the matter? Does post-camera historiography differ intrinsically from work about pre-camera times? The question persists, and it virtually brims out of a documentary called *Burma VJ: Reporting from a Closed Country*. (The name Burma, rather than the latter-day Myanmar, is used throughout.)

VJ stands for video journalist. The film consists, for the most part, of footage shot by such journalists during the massive anti-government protests in Rangoon in September 2007. The government, military and brutal, had jacked up prices on important items, and the people, in poor shape anyway, poured onto the streets, an estimated 100,000 of them. In a day or so they were joined by several thousand Buddhist monks, calm but firm in their saffron robes.

Street protests everywhere in the world are the daily bread of television news. This protest was different from most, not just because a religious order had joined it but because the government was known to be harsh. Everyone who protested in Rangoon that September knew what he or she was risking. Some lost their lives. Many of the monks have simply disappeared.

Much of the film is shot at odd angles and moves jaggedly. It is grabbed footage. The video journalists had to carry their cameras hidden in bags to avoid arrest and whipped them out when they could. It is all awesome and frightening. Some short patches were subsequently added to the film, just for clarification—conversations and arrangements—but there is never any question of what was shot during the struggle. The additions and the editing were done by the Danish director Anders Østergaard.

One moment is luminous. A crowd surges past guards to the home of Aung San Suu Kyi, the woman who had been awarded a Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 and who had been under house arrest for a total of thirteen years. When she comes out to her gate to greet people, the principal video journalist, whose voice we hear throughout, cannot squeeze close. He gets a long shot of her. In editing the picture, Østergaard cut to more and more enlarged views of her face until it fills the screen, though somewhat blurred. Like the prospect of justice.

The government was trying to mask or conceal these protests, but the VJs were eager to inform the world. Somehow footage was smuggled out and was telecast. The U.N. condemned the Burmese regime, and the United States tightened the sanctions that were already in place. (We see President Bush condemning the repressions and the killings.) But, though Burma is still smoldering, the government is still there.

Eventually, a film of this kind—even nightly television snips much like it—surely has more than immediate informational value. Can anyone now write a history of latter-day Burma without thinking of these angry brave images? Historians are not always vivid writers, but don't these faces, these scuffles, these military assaults, affect their work? How do these images make a historian's writing different from that of writers on the further past? The Rangoon VJs may have had such matters in mind when they smuggled out their footage. ◆

Jed Perl on Art

SLAUGHTERHOUSE

Is there such a thing as a wrongheaded tradition? I believe there is. And the most enduring one is surely the tradition of the artist as a romantic outlaw, which in the last half-century has been pretty much owned by Francis Bacon. His canvases, modernist melodramas with just the right crowd-friendly dash of old-fashioned grandiloquence, are the subject of a retrospective at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Bacon, who died in 1992 at the age of eighty-two, may well be the greatest exemplar of a wrongheaded tradition that we have ever seen. He had a knack for adapting all the wrong elements from all the right artists. He zeroed in on those moments when Van Gogh and Picasso were pushing their glorious anarchic energy to the brink of incoherence. This would have been fine, except that Bacon willfully ignored their ordering intelligence, preferring to sacrifice pictorial sensibility to literary sensationalism. What Bacon produced are not paintings, at least not satisfying ones. They are little more than rectangles of canvas inscribed with noirish graffiti: angst for dummies. Bacon turned his clever little quotations from the masters, old or modern, into the twentieth century's most august visual claptrap.

FRANCIS BACON: A CENTENARY RETROSPECTIVE
Metropolitan Museum of Art

There is nothing surprising about an artist feeling like a romantic outlaw, and Bacon and his supporters can cite a long tradition of more-or-less alienated creators, winding back to Caravaggio, who actually killed somebody. The trouble with Bacon is that he has not attached himself to a tradition of picture-making but to a tradition of attitudinizing. In this wrongheaded tradition, Caravaggio is admired not because he was a good painter but because he was a bad boy—which is a pretty accurate characterization of the career of Francis Bacon, too. This is not to say that artists are under any obligation to be conventionally respectable members

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of society. The fact is that an artist's outward behavior has no fixed relationship to the development or the value of his or her work. But to accept this fact, which really ought to be self-evident, one must accept also the freestanding value of art, an idea that today is devalued when it is not entirely rejected. The Bacon mystique is not grounded in his paintings so much as in a glamorous list of extenuating circumstances. (The exhibition, which has already been seen at the Tate in London and the Prado in Madrid, was organized by Gary Tinterow of the Metropolitan together with Chris Stephens and Matthew Gale of the Tate.)

Francis Bacon's paintings arrive in New York at a moment when wrong-headed traditions are the only ones that are widely esteemed, and the freestanding value of art has more or less been stood on its head, leaving us with the freestanding value of anti-art. So it is no wonder that Bacon is receiving a warm welcome among some of the newer painters who have been praised for turning the grand manner on its head, producing impersonations of traditional painting and campy send-ups of the masters. Before the Bacon retrospective opened, *Vogue* asked a number of artists to comment. "What's profound about his work is that it's not settled," declared Lisa Yuskavage, who paints bimbos with floppy hair. "It's too big. It's like a bomb dropping." George Condo, our thrift-shop Picasso, observed that "each one of his paintings is like a very elegant, bad hangover." And John Currin, who has made misogyny safe for high-end collectors, believes that "the feeling you get from Bacon is something akin to a stately mansion that you can't pay the taxes on, and you can't afford to heat. And yet, with his poverty of means—simple, unsophisticated techniques—he's able to do grand painting, completely."

Yuskavage, Condo, and Currin know, like Bacon, how to make mawkishness look cool. The trick of managing to be simultaneously empty and canny is something else that they share with the Englishman. Here is part of what Bacon had to say in the catalogue of a 1955 Museum of Modern Art exhibition, "The New Decade: 22 European Painters and Sculptors": "I would like my pictures to look as if a human being had passed between them, like a snail, leaving a trail of the human presence and memory trace of past events, as the snail leaves its slime." The Guggenheim or the New Museum ought to organize a survey of painting from Francis Bacon to Lisa Yuskavage and call it "Snail Slime."

In any event, Bacon knew exactly what he was doing when he said that. He was giving mid-century intellectuals and jet-setters just the kick in the pants that would persuade them that he was the leader of their very own avant-garde. Bacon wants to have things every which way, and this makes him a perfect pied piper for our have-your-cake-and-eat-it-too art world. His work is old-fashioned and newfangled, a carefully calculated mixture of literalism and obscurantism. Sometimes he transcribes his own face or the face of a lover more or less directly from a photograph, so that a painting becomes a bulletin board on which to pin a few images. At other times he savagely distorts a photograph, treating the head of his friend Isabel Rawsthorne as if it were made of silly putty, twisting it into a crenulated grotesque. Or he will reconstruct a scene from the life of somebody close to him. When he visualizes his ex-lover, George Dyer, slumped on a toilet in a Paris hotel, dying of an overdose of alcohol and pills, he gives his work a tabloid *frisson*. Bacon likes body fragments, partly erased figures, and heads that have been reduced to pulp. He takes autobiographical material and plays with it, running signs and symbols through the shredder, producing puzzles and enigmas, flotsam and jetsam floating in a chic void. He is especially fond of paintings that come in threes, so that the composite compositions take on a sort of religious or dramatic implication, the tangled plot line of a hellish holy trinity.

Francis Bacon, *Self-Portrait*, 1973

Alienation no longer has the hipster appeal that it had a generation ago, so that Bacon's version of the man-all-alone-in-an-unfriendly-world routine takes on a retro appeal. I would not be surprised if there are visitors to the Metropolitan who are knowingly mumbling, "Oh, that again." They may be remembering Sartre, or just *Last Tango in Paris*, which begins with some paintings by Bacon. Confronted with a prestigious retrospective at the Metropolitan, museumgoers are reluctant to gainsay the authenticity of the artist's feelings—but they may also find themselves a little weary when confronted with yet another exercise in high modern angst.

There is something rather cool about even Bacon's most violent images, and this emotional dissonance fits right in with a postmodern taste for muddleheaded irony. The early paintings, especially the shrieking Popes based on Velázquez's portrait of Innocent X, have a howling 1950s look, and visitors who know their cultural history will find themselves thinking of a traumatized postwar Europe and the dive-glamour of London's Soho, which has gained a special historical aura in recent years, as England is again hailed as a literary and artistic hotspot. By the 1970s, Bacon's surfaces are smoother, at times looking almost airbrushed. The stretches of flatly applied paint in tan, gray, pink, and orange suggest the streamlined chic of the 1970s, when furnishings and clothes were done up in Ultrasuede. These paintings are high-style bummers, bad dreams with fashionable upholstery.

Going through the Bacon retrospective, I find that everything changes and everything remains the same. For his admirers, this may be the point. There is always that tormented figure, represented by a face, an entire body, or just some body parts. Bacon likes to paint people in cages or boxes, which are indicated with a few perfunctory lines. Sometimes he drops a bed into one of his nowhere spaces, and then drops a person or maybe two people on the bed. If it is one person, then the theme is loneliness. If it is two people, then the themes are sex, love, and loneliness,

COURTESY METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

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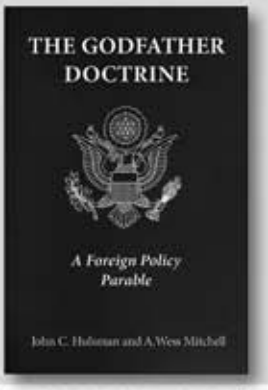
with elements of aggression mixed in for good measure. Around the figures the stage is bare or nearly bare, with the line between wall and floor suggested, if you are lucky, and the emptiness done up in red or tan or gray, depending on Bacon's mood. The message is that we are all prisoners, we are all locked in place, we cannot get up from the chair, we cannot walk through the door. In order to underline their inability to flee the isolation cells that Bacon has contrived for his allegedly archetypal figures, the artist sometimes gives one of these freakish victims an appendage that looks like a club foot, or scrambles the head so badly that you wonder if a man could even see his way through the door. What Bacon's work brings to mind are the shock tactics of the most literal Surrealists, the photographs of disfigured dolls by Bellmer, and Dalí's Technicolor porno dreams.

Earlier this season, in what amounted to a curtain raiser for the Bacon retrospective, the Gagosian Gallery mounted a show pairing work by Bacon and Giacometti. There could not have been a better demonstration of the poverty of Bacon's method. There is a coarse methodical belligerence about Bacon's work, and when the paintings are gathered together a museumgoer may be put in something like a trance state. Perhaps visitors come to accept the muffled horrors, repeated in nearly endless variations, as the sum total of artistic possibilities in the modern world. But when Bacon's paintings are juxtaposed with those of Giacometti, who was also working in the postwar years and was equally susceptible to the dark shadows that World War II cast, you can see how limited Bacon's range really is. The Gagosian show, titled "Isabel and Other Intimate Strangers," saluted their admiration for Isabel Rawsthorne, a figure in artistic and literary circles in London and Paris with whom Giacometti was for a time passionately involved. Giacometti and Bacon liked each other, but according to James Lord, in his biography of Giacometti, "concerning aesthetic objectives, the two artists did not see eye to eye. In private, Alberto expressed dislike of the chance effects and crafty sleights of technique so beloved by Francis."

In his paintings Giacometti draws on many themes that we also encounter in Bacon's work. Giacometti is interested in feelings of unease, in our sense of the unknowableness of our own bodies and the trouble we sometimes have in finding our place in the world. But when Giacometti paints, using the brush with a



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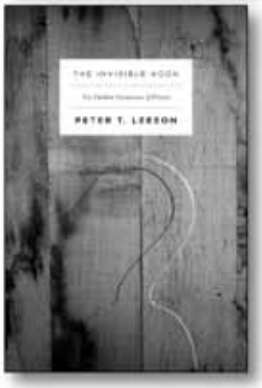

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graphic precision, articulating the nose, the eyes, the mouth, the cheekbones, he is at once disassembling the face, insisting like Bacon that we see things from some fresh perspective, *and* putting the pieces of the puzzle back together, creating a head that is as inviolably whole as a statue in an Egyptian tomb, something of which Bacon is incapable. While there is vehemence about the frontality of Giacometti's portrait subjects, there is also tenderness, and a changeableness that registers in the surprising qualities of light and air, the infinite variety that he discovers in his Parisian grays. Giacometti does not prejudge experience in the way that Bacon does. When Giacometti suggests that a man or a woman is caged or imprisoned, he also insists that they are capable of movement, of struggle—that they still have a chance of controlling their own destiny. Freedom is a possibility in Giacometti's universe, and this can pose a daunting challenge, especially for museumgoers who expect to be told what to feel.

Bacon wants the gravitas of the old masters, but he refuses to understand that the authority of Rembrandt or Goya is grounded in their avid engagement with everyday experience. Bacon never really had any interest in working directly from life. He did not do any drawings to speak of, which is especially strange for an artist who aims to reconceive the human figure. And I think that photography, which played a useful role in the paintings of Vuillard and Bonnard and other artists, is a big, baleful problem in Bacon's work. His blurred or distorted faces and bodies are nothing more than photographs seen in a funhouse mirror. He depends far too much on the fixity of photographs, which he uses to give his paintings a creepy freeze-frame fascination. The photographic image serves as a source of cheap sensation, a defense mechanism, a way of shutting down any feelings that might arise directly from experience. The result is Pop Art seen through a glass darkly, Warhol's Electric Chair paintings without the silkscreen technique. And when Bacon chooses to blur these photo-derived figures, the results are as calculatingly sentimental as anything in Gerhard Richter. The organic nature of painting, the end-to-end logic that characterizes all painting, whether in Rembrandt or in Mondrian, is rejected in favor of a modernist re-staging of a *fin-de-siècle* freakshow.

If the Bacon retrospective is a hit with the public, it will be because visitors are convinced that there are demons pursuing this artist. His art is presented as a high form of black magic, a way of vanquishing the forces of evil in our times. The wall labels make a point of reminding visitors of Bacon's gambling, his tough-guy lovers, his whiskey-soaked nights in Soho. And near the end of the show the curators leave biography behind and plunge straight into hagiography, devoting an entire gallery to photographs and other assorted talismans that Bacon kept around his studio. Here, along with movie stills, newspaper clippings, and photo-booth self-portraits, we are shown the photographs of friends and lovers on which Bacon based many of his paintings.

This dimly lit gallery, one wall of which is plastered with a photomural of Bacon's famously messy Reece Mews studio, is the show's *sanctum sanctorum*, the place where visitors can peer at all the rumpled mementoes and imagine that they are witnessing the black magic taking place. After galleries full of lifeless paintings, the curators have had the bright idea of introducing some bits and pieces of the artist's life—which turns out to consist of a heap of photographic images. This is what museumgoing is coming to in the age of reality TV.

We live in a world where the actual matter of art—the artisanal concerns, the structural assumptions—are all too often seen as reactionary and academic, something for pedants and conservatives to bother about. Why go the Giacometti route? Why bother to construct a face in detail, developing expressive distortions that are based on a painstaking study, hour by hour, day by day, of an actual person? Why go to all that trouble when you can simply take a photograph and fancy it up with some distortions that amount to little more than third-hand Picasso? It's not just that it is difficult—actually, it is nearly impossible—to do what Giacometti did. The resistance goes even deeper. There is a revulsion here against the sincerity of painting—an unwillingness to see that what is truly disturbing or challenging in painting comes out of that sincerity.

Bacon, with his prefab contortions, is the real academic—a pasticheur and parodist of avant-garde attitudes. Like all modern poseurs, he believes that biography is the ultimate trump card, that the art is more or less a reflection of the life, and in this he is again on the frontlines of a wrongheaded tradition—the tradition that values the artist above the art. In the literature about Bacon, too much is made of the terrible story of the opening of his retrospective at the Grand Palais in 1971, on the eve of which Dyer died of an overdose of drugs and alcohol. It is perfectly understandable that this terrifying event became the subject of some of Bacon's compositions. The paintings, however, are so bloodless that all they can possibly do is send you back to the story itself. There is nothing in the paintings themselves to hold you there. In Bacon's work, content trumps form every time. The emotion is as formulaic and pre-digested as in any Victorian picture of a dying child.

As the subject of a big retrospective, Bacon's life certainly has a narrative power. And without anything by Giacometti or Picasso to remind us of the poetic power that can be discovered in the anti-naturalistic figure, Bacon's brutalist paintings are going to strike many observers as the only representational alternative available to an artist in our terrible times. The lack of delicacy or sensitivity—the lack of imagination in the handling of color or line—becomes not the artist's weakness but ours, a reflection of the troubles of the age. Bacon's work is a blunt instrument, and museumgoers who begin to feel threatened or manipulated may well conclude that this is what Bacon intended. They may not be wrong. The Bacon retrospective reminds me of the Bruce Nauman show that toured the country a decade ago. Bacon is another specialist in sensory deprivation. There is a Stockholm Syndrome quality about these exhibitions. They give us so little, and what we are meant to discover is that we could not possibly be satisfied with anything more.

To the writer Michael Peppiatt, who over the years has produced a substantial literature devoted to Bacon, the artist observed near the beginning of their acquaintance, "You remember that steak we ate just now? Well, that's how it is. We live off one another. The shadow of dead meat is cast as soon as we are born. I can never look at a chop without thinking of death—that probably sounds very pompous." Well, yes it does; but then Bacon's modus operandi always involved being simultaneously pompous and profane. Early in the retrospective there is a painting in which a figure is flanked by beef carcasses. And in 1962 *Vogue* ran a photograph of a bare-chested Francis Bacon posed in front of two carcasses. By the end of the show, museumgoers may feel as if they are in a slaughterhouse, with each painting presented like a carcass hanging on a hook. The Bacon retrospective is the most fashionable slaughterhouse in the world. What we are witnessing is a nihilist blood sport, the hideous spectacle of an artist in the process of eviscerating the art of painting. ◆

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Isaac Chotiner

THE PUFFINGTON HOST

The many versions of Arianna Huffington, and their consequences.

RIGHT IS *WRONG*: HOW THE LUNATIC FRINGE HIJACKED AMERICA, SHREDDED THE CONSTITUTION, AND MADE US ALL LESS SAFE (AND WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW TO END THE MADNESS)
By Arianna Huffington
(Alfred A. Knopf, 388 pp., $24.95)

I.

When did you last read a book or an essay or a post that claimed America, or modern civilization, or "the West," was in decline, or that the United States had "lost" its innocence, or that it was "falling behind" in its educational standards, or that comity has tragically disappeared from a partisan and polarized Washington, whereas once upon a time representatives came to the capital only to do the "people's business"? Not too long ago, I suspect. But one may read exactly such laments from fifteen or thirty or even eighty years ago. Earlier prophets of doom were humming the same rueful tune. Maybe doom is just a trope. And yet the staleness of American punditry from one generation to the next is disturbing. It numbs our language, and blinds us to the ways in which our institutions are changing, or even disappearing.

In 1978, in England, Arianna Stassinopoulos published her second book, called *After Reason*. In it she proclaimed that modernity had failed us. The world was overflowing with spiritual yearnings that our trivial and materialistic society could not satisfy. Who, or what, was responsible for the malaise? A part of the blame was laid at the feet of a craven and soulless media. "For the first time in history," Stassinopoulos portentously began, "an opinion on everything has become an indispensible accessory of modern living, and everybody goes about in the cast off clothing of the latest media gurus." After approvingly quoting Kierkegaard, she continued:

> The world is reduced into flat, surveyable, two-dimensional world events; and we can all enjoy the illusion that we know exactly what has happened in the last twenty-four hours and what precisely to think about what has happened. Except that the meaning and significance that even the most averse to thought among us need, remain lost. The news and opinions, the perishable, ephemeral and valueless facts with which alone we are bombarded is as much of a substitute for the truths we long for, as a telephone number is for its subscriber. So it is not so much that we know more and more about less and less, but that we know more and more about the less and less important; and the more the precision of our knowledge increases, the more trivial the questions we seek to answer.

Arianna Stassinopoulos is now Arianna Huffington, and she is best known as the proprietor of *The Huffington Post*, and as a personification of the hyperactive up-to-the-nanosecond news-and-opinion universe of the web. Her fame now approaches her immodest ambitions. And more than Huffington's name has changed since she wrote those early premonitory words. She is now a steely—"bleeding heart" somehow does not fit—liberal, rather than a politically incorrect conservative. She has been, as Americans like to say, on a journey. Her historical timing has always been exquisite. If she is herself some sort of institution, she is an exceedingly adaptable one.

Now comes her twelfth book, lyrically entitled *Right Is* Wrong*: How the Lunatic Fringe Hijacked America, Shredded the Constitution, and Made Us All Less Safe (And What You Need To Know To End The Madness)*. It is only the most recent example of Huffington's tireless ability to inhabit different places on the political spectrum. In the early 1970s, she made herself a star by rubbing outrageously against the liberal grain. A well-turned-out young woman in articulate recoil from feminism, a woman disputing the reigning ideologies and dogmas of her day—or at least the reigning ideologies and dogmas of college and university students—was ideally suited for the role of right-wing contrarian. But that may have been the last time she moved against the wind. Now "progressivism" reigns supreme in cyberspace and in the Beltway, and noisily progressive she is. No courageous heterodoxy this time around. Now she is a "player." A look at Huffington's career reveals someone uncannily—no, cannily—adept at recognizing and navigating the social and political currents, a zeitgeist artist, even though she has written nothing that requires her to be taken seriously as a thinker.

Huffington's work is not intellectually consistent, but there are two strains that run through much of what she has written. The first is her limp spirituality, which never moves beyond fatuities and banalities. ("Our purpose is to make religion a continuous living experience, to lead us toward a resurrection not of the dead but of the living who are dead to their own truth.") The second is her frequent and caustic criticism of the Fourth Estate. Here is her earlier quotation of Kierkegaard: "In the world of opinion, newspapers demoralize men, by disaccustoming them from having an opinion of their own, and from developing themselves by carrying it in the face of opposition to the opinion of others, and by accustoming them, on the other hand, to have the guarantee for any opinion they may have that a significant number of men have the same opinion." Unpacking all the ironies here is a formidable task. Newspapers have changed considerably in the past two centuries. They currently stand as one of the very few barriers to a media universe that is comprised of almost nothing but outbursts and opinions. The Internet, Huffington's universe, too often serves as a powerful instrument of conformity ("communities of interest"). And Huffington has thrown in her lot with precisely the sort of shallow discourse that she once railed against. Her latest venture, and others like it, are contributing mightily to the death of the media institutions that she has long despised. At last her resentments are bearing fruit.

It takes a particular kind of intelligence to understand when to swim against the current and when to ride the wave. In 1973, Stassinopoulos, then a Greek immigrant and Cambridge graduate living in London, cleverly decided to pen a response to one of the era's most controversial feminists, Germaine Greer, and Greer's bestseller *The Female Eunuch*. Arriving seven years after *The Feminine Mystique*, Greer's book was released in the middle of "second-wave" feminism's heyday. Her argument was multifaceted, if unsubtle. She claimed that women needed to come to grips with

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how much men disliked them. The nuclear family was constricting women; they were trapped into hating themselves. Greer desired that women would embrace their bodies and their sexuality, even if she did go so far as to suggest the drinking of one's own menstrual blood.

In retort, Stassinopoulos's *The Female Woman* called the women's movement "repulsive," and went on to claim that "it is not a movement calling for equal opportunities, equal pay, equal status for woman's role in life, in fact as well as in law; instead it attacks the very nature of woman, and in the guise of liberation, seeks to enslave her." Stassinopoulos espoused women's "emancipation" because it would allow women to play distinctly female roles, as opposed to women's liberation, which demanded "identical patterns of behavior."

The Female Woman is a strange and unappetizing book. Stassinopoulos launches a confused attack on Mill, and writes that feminists and Nazis are ideologically *simpatico* because both groups wish to abolish the family (a bizarre claim for many reasons), and permits herself even a few homophobic digressions. Of lesbians, she writes that "their inner confusion is often expressed in arrogance, a conspicuous exhibitionism, in an attempt to compensate for the femininity they have denied and the masculinity they have failed to attain." This passage is probably the book's best example of Stassinopoulos's hypocrisy in condemning the women's movement for limiting women's roles: she, too, had a rather circumscribed idea of what constitutes femininity. Other passages appear designed simply to infuriate, in the manner of a certain sort of attention-grabbing British journalism: "Women's Lib claims that the achievement of total liberation would transform the lives of all women for the better, the truth is that it would transform only the lives of women with strong lesbian tendencies."

Huffington's evolution from bombastic reactionary to pious progressive has not occurred linearly. In the years after the release of *The Female Woman*, she continued to write frequently and controversially. There was a gossipy biography of Maria Callas and a shabby and utterly philistine "life" of Picasso. In 1986, she married the wealthy up-and-coming Republican politician Michael Huffington, who was elected to the House of Representatives from California in 1992 and then defeated in a Senate run two years later. Huffington's notable effort in this period was a spiritual guide called *The Fourth Instinct: The Call of the Soul*. As she explained, "the charge of our Fourth Instinct is to move us from the tyranny of our fight-or-flight mechanism to the liberation of a practical spirituality that transforms our everyday life." Some of the themes in *The Fourth Instinct* built on notions that she had advanced in *After Reason*, which claimed that the "spirit of man" had been firmly rejected by modern society. This book, like so many of her books, is, well, dumb. A hunger for the holy is never conducive to clear thinking. *The Fourth Instinct* reads like a mix of Deepak Chopra and Milton Friedman. "Many modern intellectuals," Huffington writes, like a good Reaganite, "are incapable of conceiving of social renewal that is the result of human action, but not of government design."

Huffington began writing a right-wing syndicated column. She fervently supported the Contract with America and the rise of Newt Gingrich, while at the same time preaching compassion for the poor. She became a figure in mid-'90s Washington, using her new megaphone, and her dining table, to speak out more loudly on the same issues that had occupied her for years. Reading Huffington's columns from this period is disagreeable, because her mixture of spiritualism, libertarianism, New Right dogmatism, and concern for the downtrodden does not amount to anything coherent. In 1995, she wrote a piece for *The Weekly Standard* declaring that Gingrich should challenge Bill Clinton for the presidency because the Speaker was the only national figure who truly cared about poverty and inner-city turmoil. "Precisely because Gingrich is right about the moral crisis the country is facing—millions of lives and entire communities destroyed by drugs, alcohol, gangs, and violence—there is a moral imperative for him to fill the leadership vacuum and address the growing devastation." Another column made the claim that the White House feared Gingrich because he could "paint vivid pictures both of the crisis and of what life will look like after the revolution," while other Republicans could not.

It is hard to know how seriously to consider Huffington's work in those years. She was a vocal critic of Great Society efforts to address social problems, but her anti-government instincts prevented her from articulating any sort of tangible blueprint that addressed real-world conditions. She may have been sincere in her concerns about poverty, but how could anybody in their right (or left) mind have believed that Newt Gingrich was the white knight sent to cure urban destitution? One is struck, again, by the discrepancy between the mediocrity of her work and the skill with which she consolidated her fame.

As the right's revolution began to cool, Huffington's revolutionary fervor started to wane, too. The Huffingtons divorced in 1997, and the following year Michael Huffington announced that he was bisexual. In 1998, Huffington published a book called *Greetings from the Lincoln Bedroom*, a lame anti-Clinton satire—Huffington is painfully unfunny—that nicely coincided with a general disgust with Washington. Her columns also became increasingly, and shrewdly, non-partisan. By the time Gingrich resigned as party leader in 1998, it was clear that Huffington was ready for her next move. After the GOP lost seats in the midterm elections in 1998, Huffington concluded that Gingrich and company had failed because they had abandoned their agenda of, in Gingrich's words, "coming to terms with what's happening to the poorest Americans," an electoral analysis that at least had the advantage of being original.

And so she made herself over as an enemy of power, a tribune of the people, an A-list populist. In 2000, Huffington published *How to Overthrow the Government*, which urged Americans to rise up and take back Washington from two corrupt political parties. Her newest campaign was perfectly timed to tap into the disappointment emanating from the dreariness of the presidential campaign of 2000. In a year in which Ralph Nader received almost 3 percent of the vote, and in which both major party candidates were neither much liked nor admired, Huffington held "shadow" political conventions and managed to play to the general anomie. Her criticism of the Clinton years evolved from concerns about the president's personal failings to a critique of his policies from the left. And she continued to demonstrate a rare gift for articulating the prevailing mood without ever saying anything especially probing or memorable. In 2003 there appeared *Pigs at the Trough*, a slightly better written jeremiad against political corruption, which was blurbed by John McCain, then Washington's reigning "maverick." That same year Huffington ran as a populist in a gubernatorial recall election in California, and succeeded only in seeming ridiculous. The election was ultimately won by a celebrity much more famous than she was.

By 2004, the Iraq invasion was starting to look like something less than a brilliant success, and liberal disgust with the Bush administration was reaching its zenith.

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Meanwhile the rise of the so-called "netroots," coupled with grave concern about the possibility of a second Bush term, had destroyed almost all momentum for insurgent political movements. The only threat to the status quo could come from John Kerry and a Democratic Party whose principal argument was that they were better at Washington than Bush was. This was the year that saw the publication of *Fanatics and Fools*, Huffington's "game plan for winning back America," which signaled that she had made her peace with the Democratic Party. Many of the book's problems—particularly its over-the-top criticisms of Schwarzenegger—were owed to her old habit of pushing any argument a demagogic step too far, of wanting too much to be noticed. There was something almost comical about the insistence of this sudden liberal that she be regarded as some kind of leader of American liberalism—that her latest incarnation be treated as her whole story.

Right Is Wrong, Huffington's newest book, is a useful document of her current version, in which progressive politics seem to come so naturally to her that one almost forgets that she has been traveling the whole time. The result is a book that is less genuine and more tiresome. "Yes, the Republican Party has always had its far-right cowboys, its Jesse Helmses and Spiro Agnews," Huffington says near the beginning of the book, explaining her transformation. "Yet they were removed from the party's more sober core. But these days . . . it has become impossible to tell where this core stops and the fanatical fringe begins." You have to re-write a not insignificant amount of history to describe the Republican Party's second postwar vice president and one of its most powerful senators—the latter a man who did the country an untold amount of damage in the realm of foreign affairs, at a time when Huffington was an active member of the GOP—as "removed" from anything other than, respectively, respect for the rule of law and common sense. There is some truth to her account of the party's evolution, even if, in a bid to make the book appear timely, locating it in the willingness of Republican primary voters to vote for their longtime bête noire John McCain is odd. She also addresses her erstwhile affection for Gingrich by saying that although he "talked a good game," his heart was "never in it." This is odd, because if there is anything that can be said for Gingrich's intellectual and political wildness, it is that his heart is in it.

Right Is Wrong is one of those books that is completely irritating even when it is correct. Like all people who have discovered their own importance, Huffington has become dull. Consider this bit: "In this time of Lilliputian figures it's clear that to end the hijacking of America by the Right each one of us needs to take up the gauntlet and stand up for truth, no matter how many in the corridors of power or at the top of the media food chain would prefer to maintain the status quo. Leadership is a risky business requiring wisdom, courage, and fortitude—and as my compatriot Socrates put it, courage is the knowledge of what is not to be feared." Her compatriot Socrates! Maybe she should have him over for dinner with some other really interesting people.

Huffington is one of those writers who mistakes press criticism for the entirety of social and political criticism. Her condescension toward the press is endless: "Someone please alert the media: not every issue fits into your cherished right/left paradigm. Indeed, that way of looking at the world is becoming less and less relevant—and more and more obsolete. And more and more dangerous." After reading these sentences, I checked the book's cover to make sure that I was reading a book called *Right Is* Wrong. That looks pretty binary to me. To understand Huffington's current place in

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the media universe, it is necessary to recall that a visceral dislike of the traditional press has always been the animating feature of so much of her work.

In *After Reason*, Huffington's enmity for the press took the form of the tired conservative lament that we are becoming a nation of softies and whiners. "In an age as deprived of greatness as ours is, saturated with mediocrity, cynicism and compromise, the unease that the appearance of someone great has always produced, turned in Solzhenitsyn's case into an outpouring of undisguised censure and distrust that can only be explained by the pundits' fear that any phenomenon of a higher order would degrade *us*—or at least diminish *them* and disturb our sacred egalitarianism." (The italics are hers.) From the talk of "greatness" to the whack at "compromise" and the sneer at "sacred egalitarianism," this could hardly be improved upon as a parody of the conservative mentality of the day.

One of the requirements of membership in Gingrichian circles in the 1990s was an infatuation with bashing the liberal media, and Huffington's critique of the press in this period was the same one that now pays Ann Coulter's bills. "Having witnessed the liberal orthodoxy's stunning defeat in the war of ideas, its allies in the media will not change course or change sides, but rather change tactics," she wrote in 1994. "Over the next year we will see a rapid increase in 'negative stories'—character assassination masquerading as investigative journalism and rumor-mongering masquerading as 'informing the readers.'" More controversially, she attacked a *Washington Post* editorial that criticized extreme verbal attacks on the federal government after the Oklahoma City bombing. "Those in the media who genuinely seek a calmer, more productive debate about our nation's challenges might begin not by censoring angry voices, but by listening and learning from what those voices have to say," she instructed the establishment from her inside/outside perch.

In *How to Overthrow the Government*, Huffington's rage at the media boiled down to the conventional—and not altogether implausible—criticism that it is overly obsessed with politicians' personal lives. The political media was becoming a celebrity media: imagine that! "Our national political debate," Huffington wrote, "threatens to become nothing more than a Beltway version of *The Jerry Springer Show*." In the Bush years her central criticism of the press was of its presentation of news in a "he said/she said" format, as if every issue had two equally valid sides. This, again, was ironic, in the light of her own immense profiting from the polarization of those years. Huffington is not exactly a paragon of complexity in political discussion.

But something else was amiss. Consider, for example, Huffington's attack on CNN's Candy Crowley in *Right Is Wrong*. Near the beginning of 2007, Crowley reported: "What Senator Kennedy is going to do is lay down the liberal view of things, which is to say, he will say, look, no additional troops [in Iraq] and no money for additional troops, unless Congress approves." According to Huffington, this is misleading. Kennedy, she says, is expressing not the "liberal" view but the mainstream view, because two-thirds of Americans wanted to end the war. She adds: "The opinion of the American people was clear. A CBS/*New York Times* poll had 63 percent opposed to continuing the war. The Democrats running for president and trying to win their votes were clear as well. But far too many in the media were still in a fog."

Huffington, you see, wants the media to reflect the zeitgeist. After the Republican takeover of Congress in 1994, Huffington lamented the media's unwillingness to fall in line behind the new majority, which was then a conservative majority. Now she implies that reality in Iraq is at least partially defined by what percentage of Americans oppose the war. But why should reporters who cover the war or politics care a whit for the results of opinion polls? Huffington is here blissfully (or cunningly) unaware that this is exactly the type of coverage that she decries for having misled Americans into supporting the war in the first place. (She is much more interested in quoting public opinion surveys from 2007 than she is in recalling the country's mood when America was set to invade Iraq.) Huffington, the queen of seizing the moment, who fears nothing so much as the wilderness, is rattled by the press's unwillingness to keep its finger in the wind.

This same servility to public opinion manifests itself in her discussion of the press's response to Hurricane Katrina. "The media's coverage . . . demonstrates the same attention deficit disorder," she remarks. "Even though the media did a good job of capturing public outrage at the time, they quickly moved on, with Katrina becoming a news afterthought suitable for occasional anniversary pieces and ribbon-cutting video." One can wholeheartedly agree with Huffington's overarching point about evaporating coverage, just as one can bravely oppose murder. But everything that Huffington knows about the outrages of Katrina she knows from the media. And more importantly, is it really the media's job during the worst domestic natural disaster in generations to capture public anger? The old distinction between facts and values, between empiricism and expressionism in journalism, is lost upon the eternally crusading (that is, positioning) Huffington. Is all journalism to be opinion journalism? And if so, what makes one opinion more decisive than another—its popularity?

Huffington even botches the obligatory takedown of William Kristol, which is the equivalent in basketball of missing an open layup. Huffington found herself on a train with Kristol where she overheard him talking on his cell phone (there is safety only in the quiet car): "'"Precipitous withdrawal" really worked,' I overheard him say, clearly referring to the president's use of the term in a July 12 press conference. 'How many times did he use it? Three? Four?'" She has no idea, of course, who was on the other end of the line; but this does not prevent her from courageously speculating. She decides that Kristol was discussing political strategy with the late Tony Snow, then the White House's press secretary. After all, Kristol and Snow were once colleagues at Fox News. And this sort of "political" chatter, of which she herself is of course never guilty, strikes her as objectionable. Do Republicans not know how to be patriotic in wartime?

II.

Nothing represents Huffington's hostility to the press more perfectly than her largest endeavor to date. *The Huffington Post* is a tremendously popular news aggregator that doubles as an outlet for a number of liberal bloggers. Huffington co-launched the site in 2005 with a former AOL executive named Ken Lerer, and four years later *The Huffington Post* receives as many as nine million hits per month. (I worked as an editor at *The Huffington Post* in 2007 for just under a month. I left because of a misunderstanding over the nature of the position I was hired for. My few interactions with Huffington were polite.) The site—which is divided into a number of sections, or "verticals"—overflows with videos, blog posts, and news. The sheer volume of information is impressively rendered and easily navigated.

Last year, in a great concession to the dustbin of history, Huffington published a book about blogging, called *The Huffington Post's Complete Guide to Blogging*.

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In her introduction she lays out some of the ways that her site fills in the gaps left behind by the mainstream media, or MSM. "I am frequently asked," she writes, "if the rise of New Media is the death knell for Old Media. My answer is that Old Media isn't dead; it's critically ill but will actually be saved by the transfusion of passion and immediacy the New Media revolution has inspired. Blogging and the new media are transforming the way news and information are disseminated—serving as a wake-up call. A wake up call the traditional media—after years of hitting the snooze button—has finally heeded. But it took awhile."

So the old media are in fact in her debt. Her warm words about old media here are surprising—except of course that she needs old media to endure as a foil for the wonderfulness of new media, in the way that the New Testament needs the Old. Huffington continues in this cordial vein with a discussion of a panel she sat on with Larry King and Sam Donaldson, who defended "Old Media" after Huffington launched an attack. "My fellow panelists, on cue, leapt to the defense of their mainstream brethren, pointing out that many of the stories I mentioned had, in fact, been covered on TV or in the big daily papers. And indeed they had. Sometimes in ninety-second news packages and sometimes even on the front page of *The New York Times*—above the fold. But that, until the rise of the bloggers, was that. Issue noted. Let's all move on. Meaning, no follow up, even as more details would come up. For too long, reporters for the big media outlets have been fixated on novelty, always moving all too quickly on to the next big score or the next hot get."

I was taken aback by her implication that bloggers are *not* fixated on novelty, that digital media do *not* move all too quickly on to the next big score or the next hot get. So one afternoon, with a solemn seriousness, I went on to *The Huffington Post* and clicked on the "Politics" vertical. Here is what I found. The top link was to a video mash-up of various conservative personalities calling Obama names. Another headline linked to a video of Keith Olbermann scolding Bill O'Reilly. A third video linked to Condoleezza Rice's appearance on *The Tonight Show*. On the main page of the site, in red, was a "Conservadems" headline about the centrist senators trying to scale back Obama's spending proposals. If you clicked on the headline, you were taken to a *Huffington Post* story about these senators, which made the perfectly reasonable point that they did not suggest what to strip from the budget (in other words, that their complaint was politically inspired). Beneath the photo was a link to a *New York Times* piece on the budget. Yahoo and AP stories were also available. There was another link to a *New York Times* op-ed from that morning, written by a former AIG executive who was fed up with "bonus rage." A little below was a video of *Morning Joe* hosts Joe Scarborough and Mika Brzezinski discussing vibrators (no, really). On the left side of the screen were a number of blog posts. The first was from Huffington herself; another was from Henry Blodget, a third was from John Kerry, and down below was one from the television actor Steven Weber, who offered the insight that "the government is itself a Ponzi scheme and the citizens which empower it its born-every-minute suckers."

On the "Entertainment" vertical was a video of Jenny McCarthy explaining her beauty secrets, which, the headline explained, included "Botox and Good Sex." Above this link was a picture of Natasha Richardson, and if you clicked on the photograph you were whisked to a *People Magazine* article about her donated organs. On the "Media" vertical, the vibrator story was given even bigger play: "Vibrator-Gate Round 4," the headline thoughtfully announced. There were also links to a video of Rachel Maddow on Jimmy Fallon, in which the MSNBC host told the late-night newcomer that he "needs to drink more manly drinks."

I have gone into this taxonomic detail to give a sense of the dizziness of the site, its attention-destroying cascades, its addiction to entertainment—and also to give a sense of why it is popular. It has something for everyone, which is of course the most ancient of print aspirations. It can be fun and it can be helpful. Ryan Grim's article on the budget was a useful corrective to the fetish that is generally made out of elected officials who consider themselves "centrist." Stories about the economic crisis, even if taken from other sources, were accessible and useful. It should be noted, though, that one of *The Huffington Post*'s tricks is to link to a mainstream news story by means of a politicized headline. In this way, readers can get hard news even as it is spun for them; and in this way digital media like *The Huffington Post* can live off the MSM even as it denounces them.

But new media, an ally of thoroughness and reflection? Come on. The new media does nothing if not "move on." In 1978, Huffington noted that "our world may be in short supply of a long list of commodities, but it will have been sunk by experts long before it runs out of expertise. As for the vaunted information explosion, it actually seems to have led to an atrophy of mental nerves." I cannot imagine a better description of the experience of her own site, with its bold colors and kinetic busyness. The goal of *The Huffington Post* is emphatically not to sustain a focus on anything other than The Next Thing. Huffington charges that the press is too distracted, too unwilling to dig deeply, too easily dispersed by gimmicks and trivialities—if this is so, then what she is up to is just about the furthest thing possible from a remedy for these ills.

The truth is that *The Huffington Post* is not just supplementing a print media that has long been dominated by newspapers. It is also helping to destroy newspapers. The trials of print media have been explored at length recently in a number of settings, both print and digital, and for good reason. But some tough questions must be asked also about the powerful digital interlopers. For the blogosphere and the news aggregators that dominate cyberspace are completely reliant—completely parasitic—on the very institutions they are driving to bankruptcy. As my cursory summary of an afternoon's content at *The Huffington Post* showed, the site is thoroughly dependent on the reporting that Huffington has spent three decades bashing. Fire up the site on your computer some evening, and see how many of its main stories are from *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post*. (One of the site's habits consists of taking the first few paragraphs from another news story and using it on a *Huffington Post* page. In an extreme case from a couple of years ago, *The Huffington Post* ran an entire *Chicago Reader* story on their site. They invited readers to click through and "read the whole story," although they had merely reprinted the entire thing.) Moreover, during last year's presidential campaign, when the site sometimes broke news, it was often with the type of reporting that Huffington claims to detest. Its biggest scoop was the revelation that Obama had referred to certain white working-class voters as "bitter," which is just the kind of story whose appearance on the front page of *The New York Times* would have provoked fire and brimstone from Huffington.

ANTHONY RUSSO

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If print media disappear, what on earth will digital media write about? What happens, as newspapers keep closing, when the new media can no longer rely on the reporting that Huffington has for so long pilloried? The hope is that other sources for investigative and in-depth journalism will come along. (And also sources for funding them: good journalism, real journalism, is not cheap.) The fear, and it is well founded, is that the proliferation of opinionated content will replace hard news reporting even more than it already has. I remember a colleague at *The Huffington Post* saying that he had been "out of pocket" for a week, and found it depressing that he missed *The New York Times* more than *The Huffington Post*.

Given Huffington's erstwhile concern that the citizenry would go around in "the cast off clothing of the latest media gurus," her own ubiquitous presence on her site is rather amusing. What is she, if not a media guru? Her blog posts are given prominent play, as are her frequent television appearances. She is an accomplished self-aggregator. No print magazine or newspaper would permit itself such a cult of personality. But the focus on Huffington herself is congruent with the site's other great obsession, aside from progressive politics: its adoration of celebrities.

The celebrity-as-citizen-journalist is one of Huffington's products. Lerer, in his foreword to the site's blogging guide, admits that when *The Huffington Post* was launched, it lacked certain resources, but what it "*did* have was Arianna's unique rolodex." (Translation: not enough journalists, but plenty of boldfacers.) There is nothing wrong with reading blog posts by Larry David or Alec Baldwin—this is a free country; but the space and the prominence given on *The Huffington Post* to the rich and the famous does not mix easily with its other stated ambitions. The results are contributions to the national conversation such as this one, by Sean Penn: "While I'm not a proponent of the Death Penalty, existing law provides that the likes of Cheney, Bush, Rumsfeld and Rice, if found guilty, could have hoods thrown over their heads, their hands bound, facing a 12-man rifle corps executing death by firing squad. And our cowardly democratically dominated House and Senate can barely find one voice willing to propose so much as an impeachment." I agree that this is not a view that is frequently heard, and so perhaps its author and its publisher may justly flatter themselves that they are travelling to the beat of a different drum. The problem with Penn's view is not that it is heterodox, but that it is stupid.

The celebrity focus helps to enforce the site's ideological conformity, too. The supposedly liberal newspapers of America still publish conservative columnists and offer a wide range of viewpoints. But the ideological orientation of *The Huffington Post* is monolithic and overwhelming, and this cements the impression that the site, for all its excitement about diversity and dissent, is just another one of the internet's like-minded communities. This accounts for *The Huffington Post*'s remarkable inability to surprise. It is just glitzy edification for the progressive congregation. Huffington is not so much a leader as a cheerleader. In the same blogging guide, *The Huffington Post*'s "community manager" instructs that "a blog is only as good as the people who read it." That is exactly backward—a formula for good merchandising, not for good journalism. Uniformity is an odd way of honoring democracy. Just look at Fox.

Thirty years ago Huffington wrote in indignation that "when the focus of life becomes as narrow and as journalistic as ours has become, then there is no more room for the spaciousness of myth, the saga, the legend, the chronicle, the *geste* or any of the other forms to which previous cultures have turned to account for 'what really happened,' and to give the individual reference points for what was happening in his time. Instead we are bombarded with monumentally unimportant information, with prewrapped commentary and predigested interpretation, and with accounts of what has happened, to the nearest dazzling minute, and sometimes nearer, at which it happened." Well, yes. Bombarder, heal thyself. But perhaps it is a mistake to hold Arianna Huffington to any real standard of intellectual or journalistic rigor. She is just an adventuress, ideologically and socially; an impresario, with a practiced eye for the main chance; a media phenomenon, which is among the thinnest phenomena of all; a nimble brand. The other day I opened a book and came upon an epigraph that reminded me of her and her hunger: "I wanted to do business faster than the ordinary mercantile transactions would admit." That was said by P. T. Barnum. ◆

Anne Applebaum
NOW WE KNOW

SPIES: THE RISE AND FALL OF THE KGB IN AMERICA
By John Earl Haynes, Harvey Klehr, and Alexander Vassiliev
(Yale University Press, 637 pp., $35)

If one were trying to define the lowest point in the long and venerable tradition of American anti-communism, surely it came in 2003, with the publication of Ann Coulter's *Treason*. Coulter's "thesis" in this work of cut-and-paste-from-the-Internet history was that a straight line could be drawn between Americans such as Alger Hiss, who spied for the Soviet Union in the 1940s, and Americans such as Barack Obama, who criticized the war in Iraq half a century later. Both of these groups—along with assorted socialists, liberals, trade unionists, and pretty much anyone whom she defined as "Left"—were guilty of nothing less than treason: "Whether they are defending the Soviet Union or bleating for Saddam Hussein, liberals are always against America. They are either traitors or idiots, and on the matter of America's self-preservation, the difference is irrelevant. Fifty years of treason hasn't slowed them down."

To be fair, which in Ann Coulter's case counts as an irony, she is not the only writer to have lost her sense of proportion, and maybe even her sanity, while contemplating the exceedingly complicated history of the American Left, and in particular its extended flirtation with the Soviet Union. Madness of a different sort—or perhaps of a deceptively similar sort—also characterizes the writings of Victor Navasky, the former editor and publisher of *The Nation*. Navasky has written many times on the subject of Hiss and other Soviet spies, with a sense of urgency that the passage of time never diminishes. An excellent example of his thinking on this subject can be found in an article in *The Nation* in 1997, describing the work of historians who were just then beginning to find evidence in the Soviet archives confirming that a number of Americans, including Hiss, had

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indeed collaborated with Soviet intelligence. "Like crazed lepidopterists with their butterfly nets," Navasky wrote, "they wildly try to capture every fugitive document that flutters into view to pin on their post-Cold War specimen boards. Their manic goal: to prove that the forties and fifties red-hunters with whom they now identify were right all along … [and that] the wholesale suspension of liberties that characterized the Cold War years was justifiable after all." It is a striking use of metaphor. Would Navasky use the phrase "crazed lepidopterists" to describe those who keep pursuing, say, the still-mysterious fate of Raoul Wallenberg? I don't think so.

Somewhere between these two poles—between Navasky's pathological inability to believe that there really were Soviet spies in America and Coulter's pathological inability to make distinctions between liberal Democrats and paid foreign agents—lies the remarkable work of John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr. If there is any reasonable middle ground to be found in this particularly fraught debate—and by middle I mean historically true—Haynes and Klehr have done their best to define it and to occupy it. Working for more than a decade, making the best possible use of newly released Soviet archival material, the two scholars have produced multiple books, including three learned and exceptionally sane works of history in Yale University Press's splendid Annals of Communism series.

The first of their volumes, *The Secret World of American Communism*, used the newly opened archives of the Comintern, the organization that ran the international communist movement, to determine the extent of Soviet funding of the American Communist Party—which, it turns out, was quite substantial. The second, *The Soviet World of American Communism*, also used Soviet archives, but focused more directly on the Soviet Union's ideological influence on the Communist Party of the United States, or CPUSA, which was—surprise!—even more substantial. The third, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America*, examined the National Security Agency's declassified "Venona" files as well as Soviet archives relevant to it. Venona was a joint American and British cryptological project that deciphered Soviet wartime cables. Among other things, the cables provided direct evidence that the Soviet Union was running a large espionage network in the United States during the 1940s—and that Alger Hiss and Julius Rosenberg were among the Soviet Union's most valued agents.

Haynes and Klehr have usually stuck to the documents, the evidence, the facts. At least in their historical works, they do not write polemically, and they have emphatically not endorsed Senator Joseph McCarthy and his analysis of American communism. In *The Secret World of American Communism*, they went out of their way to condemn McCarthy for having used anti-communism "as a partisan weapon." His "excesses," they note, continue to distort the debate about the history of American communism to this day. Of course, this has not prevented critics from attacking Haynes and Klehr for McCarthyism.

Their newest work, a history of Soviet espionage in America, continues their research in this same spirit, although it makes use of a different kind of source. Along with Soviet archives, FBI archives, and the Venona cables, Haynes and Klehr this time around had access also to a set of KGB operational files that have not yet been opened to Western researchers. (In what follows I use "KGB" to mean Soviet foreign espionage, even though it had other names in the 1930s.) The story of how they got access to these materials is a little involved. In a long introduction to *Spies*, their Russian co-author, Alexander Vassiliev, explains his complicated personal story. Vassiliev was a junior KGB officer, trained in the late 1980s. Fed up with service at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, he quit. Though he spent several fruitful years in journalism, Vassiliev's past associations were strong enough to persuade the foreign department of the old KGB—now renamed the Foreign Intelligence Service, or SVR—to call on him when they needed a writer to sort through their operational files: it seems that a group of retired officers thought they could burnish their reputations and earn some money by publishing stories of their glorious exploits in the West. They hired Vassiliev to work on a book about Soviet espionage in the United States, together with the American historian Allen Weinstein. The book eventually appeared in 1999 under the title *The Haunted Wood*.

Though the book was successful, the project became an enormous burden for Vassiliev. Intimidated by the increasing politicization of history in Russia and then by the closing of the archives, he left the country. Angered by those who questioned his motives, he foolishly sued one of the book's reviewers. Certain of winning, he acted as his own attorney and refused to settle out of court, forgetting

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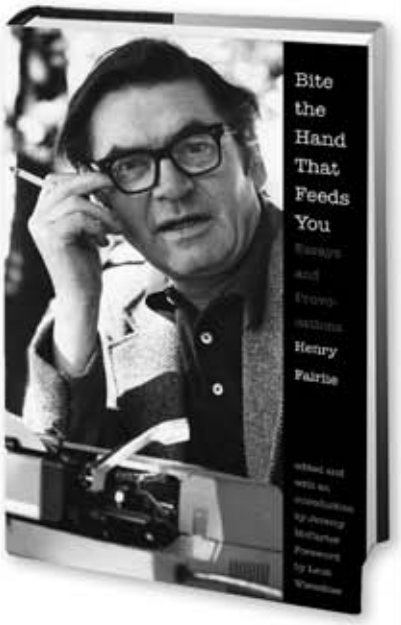

BITE THE HAND THAT FEEDS YOU

Essays and Provocations

Henry Fairlie

Edited by Jeremy McCarter

Foreword by Leon Wieseltier

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—Andrew Sullivan, senior editor, *The Atlantic*

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that London juries do not warm to former KGB officers. He lost. Finally he approached Haynes and Klehr with a proposal to share with them the extensive notes that he had made on the KGB's operational files, and to supply the real names of people whom he had concealed even from Weinstein. His notebooks—together with the Venona cables, FBI records, and other sources—form the basis of this new book. In addition, they have been made available, in their original handwritten form and in English translation, on the website of the Wilson Center's Cold War International History Project, where they can be read by all and sundry.

Perhaps this was not the best way to get hold of KGB operational files, but it is the only way there was. Naturally, questions have been raised about Vassiliev's bona fides—but the notebooks are too detailed, and contain too many obscure references to people and places that Vassiliev could not possibly have known about in advance, to have been faked. In any case, the evidence that Vassiliev's notes are both authentic and reliable lies in the text itself. *Spies* is not a literary work, or even a narrative history, in the ordinary sense. It is filled with facts, figures, names, and dates. Much of it consists of long point-by-point comparisons of Vassiliev's files, the FBI's files, the Venona documents, and the testimony of witnesses and defectors. Assertions are proven, and then proven again using different sources. Footnotes contain lists of multiple sources. A seven-paragraph description, for example, of the fate of Morris and Lona Cohen—a mysterious couple who worked as KGB couriers from the 1930s to the 1960s—is substantiated by eleven different books and documents. This, presumably, is the sort of work that Navasky scorns as lepidoptery, "capturing every fugitive document." It is also very powerful to read.

Aside from the more familiar stories of atomic espionage and Alger Hiss, about which more in a moment, there is much in *Spies* that is absolutely new. Among other things, the KGB files enabled Haynes and Klehr to identify dozens of people previously known to the FBI only by their cover names. A scientist listed in the Venona cables as "Fogel" or "Persian," who was long thought to be J. Robert Oppenheimer, turns out to be Russell McNutt, an obscure Manhattan Project engineer who at one point worked on structural designs for the uranium and plutonium processing facilities in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. At one point the FBI conducted a superficial investigation of his relationship to Julius Rosenberg, who was in fact his recruiter. They found nothing. As a result, McNutt escaped the public notoriety that accrued to Rosenberg, not to mention the death penalty. He lived out the last part of his life as the chief engineer of Gulf Oil.

A similar story can be told about a very different character, a State Department mole code-named "Willy," who can now be identified as David Salmon. At the time of his recruitment in 1934, Salmon was an aging, and underpaid, former protégé of former secretary of state Elihu Root. As head of the Division of Communications and Records, Salmon was responsible for all of the State Department's cables, the most interesting of which he seemed happy to sell for $15,000 a year (about $230,000 in contemporary dollars). Salmon kept this up for three years, but he seems to have panicked in 1937, when the American ambassador to the Soviet Union complained to the State Department that his Soviet counterparts seemed to know the contents of his "secret" reports to Washington. A cursory investigation was conducted, and then dropped. Never suspected of anything during his lifetime, Salmon was considered so trustworthy that several years after his retirement, the House Committee on Un-American Activities asked him to authenticate the State Department cables being used as evidence in the Alger Hiss investigation. Which he did.

Spies also offers a good deal of additional information and—let's be frank—juicy details about some minor figures whose affiliations were already known. One of these is Michael Straight, a rather unserious person whom readers of this magazine may recognize as the son of the early owners of The New Republic and later the magazine's publisher and editor. As a student in Britain in the 1930s, he met Anthony Blunt and Guy Burgess, two of the infamous Cambridge spies. Burgess recruited him despite the fact that Straight was "not quite ready to let go of certain romantic notions," as he wrote to his KGB minder. Another KGB officer later described Straight—cover name "Nigel"—as a "dilettante." A number of American officials seem to have taken a similar view, and Straight never progressed very far in his short government career. He fell out with both the Communist Party and the KGB after the Nazi-Soviet pact in 1939. Haynes and Klehr point out, however, that he maintained a wobbly affiliation, recommending friends to the KGB as late as 1942, and keeping silent about Burgess and Blunt until 1963.

Then there is Martha Dodd—cover name "Liza"—who, while living with her father, Roosevelt's ambassador to Berlin, fell in love with a Soviet diplomat named Boris Vinogradov. Like Straight, she later produced a carefully edited memoir. But Haynes and Klehr add new details to her story, including the report of an interview that a deeply shocked KGB operative conducted with Dodd in 1941:

> Sometime during our conversation—I don't recall exactly when—Martha made the remark that all men were vulnerable … somewhere. Does this mean, I asked her, that you feel that you could sleep with most any man if you so chose? "Yes," she said. And then: "It might be advantageous at times." (This she meant in terms of political work.)

So rattled was he by Dodd that the poor KGB man had to go to the bathroom and wash his face. But he returned, determined to see the interview through:

> Externally presenting a cool and confident appearance, I lectured on middle class morals, proletarian morals, when sex is permissible in our kind of work, when not.… The above may sound silly but it had a good effect on Martha. She became very sober.

Some of the operational details in *Spies* are marvelous also, such as these "meeting instructions," straight out of a Hollywood plot, handed to an agent: "The source will have a *Life* magazine in the right pocket of his overcoat, and if the weather is good, a hat in his left hand. You will say, in English, 'Regards from Alice.' He will reply, 'Thanks, I would like to visit her.' You will say, 'She will be very glad to see you.' After that, you can get down to business."

But amusing though the details may be, the most significant contribution of Klehr's and Haynes's book is its revelation of the sheer extent of Soviet espionage in America, and the numbers of people involved in it. Despite the length of this hefty volume, Haynes and Klehr discuss only a portion of some five hundred agents who at some point worked for the KGB, and about whom some details can be found in Vassiliev's notes or in the Venona files. Not all of these people were actually passing on information. Some worked as handlers, couriers, recruiters and talent spotters. The role of others may well have been exaggerated, as critics have pointed out, by the eager workers of the KGB—though

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certainly not all of them, given the specific details of information handed over.

If only a quarter of the people whose names appear in the files were truly agents, the numbers are still much larger than anyone previously suspected, and they represent a far deeper penetration into American society than we have hitherto known. As it turns out, the KGB in the 1930s had agents or contacts in the State Department, the Commerce Department, the Justice Department, and the OSS, the wartime intelligence agency. KGB associates were scattered throughout the Manhattan Project as well as in research institutions and private companies specializing in chemistry, aviation engineering, and physics. There were agents in the media and the literary world. The KGB even tried, not very successfully, to recruit Ernest Hemingway.

The remarkably wide range of education and experience of the KGB's agents was impressive, further proof of how deep into the culture their tentacles reached. Some of the KGB's American agents were, as one might expect, recent immigrants of Russian and East European origin. Others, such as Hiss, were Establishment WASPs. (I counted here graduates of Princeton, Stanford, Harvard, Columbia, Cornell, and the Union Theological Seminary, among others.) Samuel Dickstein was a Congressman, then a New York Supreme Court Judge. Henry Ware was a consultant to the Boy Scouts. Harold Glasser, on the other hand, wound up working for the Liberty Brush Company.

Yet most of them did, in the end, have something in common. Aside from a very small number who handed over documents purely for the money—Dickstein, certainly, and probably Salmon—most of them were either open or secret members of the American Communist Party, a group that was at the time closely aligned with the Soviet Communist Party. They were, in other words, not "liberals" at all.

Though it was long a taboo subject on the Left, the extraordinarily close relationship between the American Communist Party and the KGB should nowadays surprise no one, given what we now know about the CPUSA, and about other communist parties in other countries, and about communist ideology, the power of which should never be underestimated. Generally speaking, those who believed in communism also believed in the desirability of world revolution. Generally speaking, those who believed in the desirability of world revolution thought that this revolution would be led, or at least inspired, by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and its "sword and shield," the KGB. Those who made such assumptions may have been well-meaning people, even American patriots, as their defenders have often claimed. But that does not change the fundamental point. To the truly dedicated Marxist, the goals of the KGB and the CPUSA would have seemed very similar indeed.

And rightly so. From those organizations' own points of view, their goals were very close, not to say identical. Earl Browder, the General Secretary of the CPUSA from 1930 onward, recruited and recommended agents to the KGB. His sister was certainly an agent; so, quite possibly, was his wife, a former Soviet provincial justice commissar (and a woman who sat on the ad-hoc courts that condemned "counter-revolutionaries" to death in 1918 and 1919, during the Russian civil war). The top CPUSA officials knew their money was coming from Moscow, and did not object. On the contrary. At least in the years before the Cold War, the line between loyalty to the CPUSA and loyalty to the Soviet Union was very muddled.

For the KGB the close relationship between the Soviet Union and the CPUSA turned out to be both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, the sympathy that so many Americans felt in the 1930s for Soviet communism helped the KGB to create a large and varied espionage network. Collectively, these agents and contacts were of tremendous significance to the Soviet Union. Without question, the material they provided helped the Soviet Union to develop the atomic bomb more quickly than it otherwise would have done, and thus helped to reinforce the Soviet Union's occupation of Eastern Europe and entrench the Cold War. The background they supplied also helped Stalin to negotiate with Roosevelt at Yalta, and more generally helped the Soviet leadership to understand the motivations of the United States before and during World War II, at a time when the American government was focused on a different set of enemies.

In the long term, however, these ideologically motivated agents turned out to be inherently unstable. Had they been motivated solely by money—or, like so many Soviet citizens, by fear—the KGB's American operatives might have remained faithful. But because they were inspired by ideas, their loyalties tended to evolve along with their politi-

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cal views. When they decided that they disliked some aspect of the Party's policies, or the Soviet Union's diplomacy, they could drop out of contact, or, even worse, defect.

Thus the KGB lost a good number of its agents—not only Michael Straight, but also Whittaker Chambers—owing to widespread disgust at the Soviet show trials of 1937–1938 and the pact with Hitler in 1939. It lost even more when another one of its agents, Elizabeth Bentley, came to distrust her Soviet minders and to question their motives. She spilled the beans in 1945. Bentley's testimony was devastating, since she knew the identities of more than a dozen paid agents. Also, she made her decision to talk to the FBI at a time when American counter-intelligence was turning away from the question of German and Japanese agents, and finally had time to focus its attention on the KGB.

The result was rapid and dramatic. Within weeks of Bentley's defection, the KGB's extraordinary American network—a network that had delivered crucial insights into the workings of the American government and American industry, not to mention critical secrets of the atomic bomb—fell apart. It never really recovered. With the rise of anti-communism in the late 1940s, more people understood that loyalty to the Soviet Union was a betrayal of American values. The CPUSA shrank in size and influence and, along with it, the pool of potential KGB recruits as well.

I realize that much of this will sound like little more than background noise to a certain kind of reader. Invariably, when the subject of the KGB in America comes up, many people want to know only the answer to three questions: Was Alger Hiss a spy? Was J. Robert Oppenheimer a spy? And what about the beloved radical journalist I. F. Stone? The good news, I mean for the cause of historical veracity, is that Haynes, Klehr, and Vassiliev deal with all of them.

They devote their entire first chapter to Hiss, dispensing with the most notorious controversy right off the bat. I am not going to rehearse here the whole history of this infamous case or discuss at length the various pseudonyms that might or might not have belonged to Hiss, let alone the various typewriters. Suffice it to say that Vassiliev's documentation adds to the crazed lepidopterists' mountain of "fugitive documents" already in existence. Aside from the evidence produced by Whittaker Chambers, aside from the evidence gathered by the FBI, aside from the evidence in the Venona files, aside from the evidence in the Hungarian archives and aside from the testimony of multiple witnesses, Vassiliev also found a number of archival documents clearly listing Hiss, by his real name, as a Soviet intelligence source—or, more correctly, as a source of the GRU, Soviet military intelligence, in the 1930s.

The fact that Hiss was originally working for the organization that the KGB called "the neighbors" has been a source of difficulties for researchers, as it was in Hiss's lifetime. (His attempt in 1936 to recruit a colleague, Noel Field, to the GRU ended awkwardly when it emerged that Field was already working for the KGB; records of this incident are by now recorded in both Soviet and Hungarian archives as well as in the testimony of several witnesses.) Since Hiss was a GRU contact during his most active period of service, more extensive archival information about his espionage—what documents he turned over, for example—is still unavailable, since no one has yet had access to that archive. If and when they emerge, the files in those archives will no doubt add layers of nuance and color to the Hiss story, enabling someone, eventually, to write his complete biography, and to provide a better explanation of his complicated psychology. That will be a fascinating book. In the meantime, the evidence of his collaboration is overwhelming. Haynes, Klehr and Vassiliev are well within their rights to title their chapter "Alger Hiss: Case Closed."

The tale of Oppenheimer, the mercurial physicist who led the Manhattan Project, comes out rather differently. After examining an equally vast pile of fugitive documents, the authors conclude that Oppenheimer was a secret Communist Party member, at least through 1941. Knowing this, the KGB made multiple attempts to persuade him to cooperate. Traces of those attempts appear in Vassiliev's files, as they have in other places. But, at least according to all of the evidence available in those same files, the attempts failed.

As noted, plenty of other people did in fact pass atomic and other technical material to the Soviet Union. Most famous among them was the physicist Klaus Fuchs, long ago identified as a Soviet agent. But although there were others, including McNutt, no one, as far as we now know, ever persuaded Oppenheimer himself to pass information to the KGB. We do not know exactly why: Haynes and Klehr think that by the time the Manhattan Project started—this was after the Hitler-Stalin pact—he had lost his earlier faith. Their conclusion is that Oppenheimer was not honest about his Party affiliations, but did not sell atomic secrets. Once again, case closed.

As for I. F. Stone, the story is a little blurrier, since Stone, unlike Hiss or Oppenheimer, never had any proper secrets to pass on. More to the point, his assistance to the KGB, such as it was, took a subtler form. Although he is mentioned in Vassiliev's files, unambiguously, as a KGB source between 1936 and 1938, it is not clear from the material cited here what that meant. Stone was undoubtedly exchanging information with people whom he knew to be Soviet agents. He undoubtedly gave them the names of other people whom he thought they might find useful. He may have acted as a courier as well as a recruiter, and he probably had more than a few lunches with shifty characters. The KGB also tried to re-activate him after the war, but failed. Haynes and Klehr conclude that, between 1936 and 1938, the KGB believed that Stone was their agent, and Haynes and Klehr also think

Negligent Worldicide

The bear climbed over the mountain,
and what do you think he saw?
History raging and ravaging, carving up
the one and only body of the earth,
the new century already broken into,
ransacked, roads unsafe,
war playing in the background,
infants crawling on the landfill.

The earth was heaven once, and now it's hell.
Since it's already begun to embalm itself,
let's assume that that these are close to
our last words. That's what I meant by urgent.

Oh fuck, I'm going to have to take it
in my arms again. I'm going to have to
love it again, dear corpse of earth,
dear tough-muscled body of the river,
still ignorant of putrefaction,
or the slow downstream parade
of dead beings. I say goodbye
to petals every day. Lilac, wild rose,
poppy disintegrating, one moment
a flower and the next no flower.

CHASE TWITCHELL

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that Stone knew this. But whether he was getting paid for his little chats with the local handlers, and whether he himself would have considered his activities "espionage," is still unclear. The Stone case is not yet closed.

There is an explanation for the lack of clarity. In fact, Stone's cooperation with Soviet intelligence seems to me a perfect example of the pattern described above. Stone, at least at that time, still had faith in the essential goodness of communism. Mistakes had been made, but between 1936 and 1938 he still believed that only Stalin could save Europe from fascism. He would hardly object if the agents of Stalin asked him to pass on some messages or to recommend a few friends. In fact, it is hard to think of a good reason why he would not do so, given what he was writing and saying at the time. I am speculating here, but the speculation is plausible.

To understand Stone, it helps to read the rest of *Spies*. Anyone who focuses on the details of his case alone will find it hard to see his story for what it was. The same is even more true of Hiss. Though treatises have been written about Hiss's typewriter fonts and bird-watching habits, his life story is rarely compared to those of his contemporaries. Reading through these three accounts, I found it refreshing to see them all placed in historical context, together with less famous figures as well as the Soviet station chiefs who reported back on them. Without that context, none of these stories makes sense. Why would a shining young member of the Establishment like Hiss collaborate with the KGB? Why would a star scientist like Oppenheimer have been so heavily recruited, and why did so many of his colleagues succumb? Why would Stone, an independent curmudgeon, even consider talking to such people? Why would Hemingway, for that matter? The answers lie in the larger context: the nature of the international communist movement in the 1930s, and the extraordinary power of its ideology.

For all of their prosaic insistence on names, dates, and extensive footnotes, some of the appeal of that ideology does come through in the works of Haynes and Klehr. They conjure into existence a whole vanished world of code words and dead letter drops, of Marxist jargon and Party slang. The secret meetings, the study groups, the sense of belonging to an avant-garde that would make history—all this is here. So, too, is the blindness to reality. By all accounts, Hiss was a convincing witness at his hearing, far more so than Chambers; almost everyone agreed that his declarations of innocence sounded a lot more believable than the allegations of his accuser. But Hiss had once believed that Soviet-style communism would create utopia in America. Why wouldn't he believe in the fantasy of his own innocence, too?

The historical context also matters because it enables us to make useful distinctions. The story of Hiss differs from the story of Oppenheimer, which differs from the story of Stone. Lumping them all together as "traitors," in a coarse Coulter-like manner, makes it impossible to understand their motivations as well as the culture in which they lived. Refusing to discuss the uneven but fascinating evidence available, as Navasky would have us do, also does them a disservice. If one is writing a history of the Manhattan Project, it is important to know that no, the boss did not sell the secrets. If one is writing about the culture of Cold War America, it is important to know that yes, Hiss was a spy. Besides, the biographies of these men read like airport thrillers. Why shouldn't we keep on investigating them?

The truth, of course, is that neither Coulter nor Navasky, nor any of the many others who have joined this particular battle, is really interested in history. They and their respective allies instead wish to score points about contemporary politics—points that bear only a tendentious relationship to the events of the 1930s and the 1940s. Coulter and her ilk want modern liberals to be identified with the CPUSA: Hiss = Obama. Navasky and his friends suspect that anyone who investigates Hiss is covertly promoting "the wholesale suspension of liberties": historical research = Guantánamo. There is something dim and lifeless about this kind of apologetic argument, which is why wading though the writings of the Coulters and the Navaskys is a torment, like watching an endless episode of *Crossfire*.

Too many people have drained this particular chapter of history of interest by manipulating it for partisan purposes—as, once upon a time, Senator McCarthy did. Perhaps the best way to put McCarthy's ghost to rest, and to breathe life back into one of the most turbulent moments in American intellectual history, is to follow the example of this genuinely important and darkly fascinating book. Follow the facts, and just the facts, because they might lead you to places stranger than fiction. ◆

Peter Green
A BYZANTINE HEART

C.P. CAVAFY: COLLECTED POEMS
Translated, with introduction and commentary, by Daniel Mendelsohn
(Alfred A. Knopf, 624 pp., $35)

C.P. CAVAFY: THE UNFINISHED POEMS
Translated, with introduction and commentary, by Daniel Mendelsohn
(Alfred A. Knopf, 144 pp., $30)

I.

GREECE, as a nation-state, has only existed since 1832. The Greece that most of us have at the back of our minds, that of archaic and classical antiquity, consisted of a collection of quarrelsomely independent city-states, united only by language, cult, and a contempt for the Barbarian Other. They boasted, rightly, of having fought off the Persian menace, but then spoiled the picture by themselves succumbing in turn to Macedonia, Rome, Byzantium, the Franks, the Venetians, and the Ottoman empire, of which they formed a subject province for some four centuries. Yet they never forgot Marathon and Salamis, much less the extraordinary, and quite unique, cultural efflorescence of the Periclean Age. When, after independence was won, the London Committee, a decidedly dodgy group of British philhellenes and speculative investors, tried to arrange repayment of the enormous loans that had helped finance the Greek War of Independence, they were supposedly told, with *hauteur*, that this had been not a loan, but a partial payment for the incomparable legacy that the new state's Hellenic ancestors had bequeathed to the world. The debt was in fact never repaid, and liquidated only in 1878.

As independent Greece started, so it went on: its process of self-invention (still in progress) has always tended to

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involve noisy, and sometimes disastrous, assertions of aggressive nationalism. This mood has been reflected, at varying levels, in the extraordinary literary renaissance accompanying the emergence of a Hellas that, for the first time, could boast—despite persistent domestic bickering—that it had political as well as linguistic and religious unity to go with its newly won freedom. In 1823, with the Greek revolutionaries split by serious rivalries, the poet Dionysios Solomos published, as a rallying cry, his famous "Hymn to Liberty," the first two stanzas of which still form the text of the Greek national anthem. Kostis Palamas (1859–1943) not only wrote the "Hymn for the Olympic Games," but was also a pioneer in the fight to free Greek literature from its adhesion to the artificial "purist" language (*katharévousa*, an attempt to revive ancient Attic), and to promote the literary use of the vernacular (*dêmotikê*). A passionate nationalist, his funeral in German-occupied Athens was the occasion for a vast anti-Nazi protest.

A prominent speaker at that funeral was the poet Angelos Sikelianos, who had seen the danger of losing Greece's classical heritage along with the "purist" tradition, and worked hard, not least by means of a glitzy Delphic Festival, to reconcile antiquity with the new demotic ideal. The polyglot and highly intellectual diplomat-poet George Seferis, modern Greece's first winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, was a passionate nationalist who in 1956 broke off relations with his old friend Lawrence Durrell over the British stance on Cyprus (an island that had strikingly renewed his poetic creativity). Odysseus Elytis, the twentieth-century Greek poet who also won the Nobel Prize, had fought in Albania in World War II, and used his wartime experiences in a great poem, the *Axion Esti*, or *Worthy It Is*, a moving tribute to the Greek landscape and the perennial Greek struggle for freedom, which appeared in 1959. Some of its best-known verses, set to music by Mikis Theodorakis, have become a kind of unofficial second national anthem.

All these, in their various ways, fitted in with a political vision that has dreamed—and in 1921–22 did more than just dream—of re-conquering Ionia and Constantinople, and which promotes Alexander the Great as a strictly heterosexual and wholly Greek national hero—an icon in whom the Orthodox Church, no less than bellicose irredentists and army recruits, can take proper pride. But the Greeks have also always been eager to have the Western world, and above all the English-speaking world, acknowledge the justice of their cause, and how better to do this than through their undeniably dazzling modern literary renaissance?

Here, however, they came up against a curious, and initially embarrassing, stumbling block. Though some of their best poets, most particularly Seferis, had achieved limited fame, and translation, among Western intellectuals, it could hardly be said that they had made a deep or lasting impression on the Anglo-American educated public. That achievement had been improbably reserved for Constantine Cavafy, a rather seedy homosexual domiciled in Alexandria in Egypt, who visited Greece only four times in his life, spoke Greek with a marked British accent (until the age of nine, Seferis claimed, English was Cavafy's only language), and wrote nostalgic poems about memories of one-night stands with beautiful rent-boys. The poet's surname was derived from *kavaf*, Arabic-Turkish for a hawker of cheap shoes, while his given name honored the Christianizing founder of the Byzantine empire. When he wrote poems about classical Hellas, which was seldom, he stressed not its glories but its ironic failures.

Not surprisingly, Cavafy's appearance on the literary scene provoked vigorous initial opposition from the ultra-patriotic supporters of Palamas. (The least suggestion that prominent figures from Hellenic history may have been homosexual can still provoke riots among the Greek faithful, for whom the classical past has been subtly imbued with Orthodox Christian morals.) But in Greece as elsewhere, in the long run nothing succeeds like success. Most modern Greek poets are lucky to get their collected works translated into English once. The 154 poems that constitute Cavafy's official "canon" have so far, by my count, garnered ten versions, and I see no reason to believe that Daniel Mendelsohn's new translations will be the last. As early as 1926, Cavafy was awarded the Silver Star of the Order of the Phoenix for services to literature, a tacit Greek condonation of his more inflammatory subject matter. True, it was bestowed on him by Theodore Pangalos during the latter's brief military dictatorship, at about the same time as he tried to reduce inflation by ordering all banknotes cut in half—but still a bridge had been crossed, and from then on, to the discomfort of conservative moralists, Cavafy has been acknowledged by the country he so seldom visited as one of its greatest modern literary figures.

Thus the recognition that Greece sought so long from the English-speaking West has been lavished on a poet who quietly opposed or undercut almost everything that Hellenizing propaganda stood for and continues to uphold today. Famous poets from Auden to Heaney have written about Cavafy, introduced his translations, and acknowledged his influence on their own work. The texts of Cavafy's unfinished poems, now translated by Mendelsohn for the first time, were pieced together from fragmentary successive drafts by the Italian scholar Renata Lavagnini, with the minute care—and the same technique—normally lavished only on the papyrus scraps of a major classical author, and their retrieval was hailed as a major literary discovery. If the Greeks, as is sometimes alleged, invented irony, this has to be an almost unrivalled example of it. What, we may well ask ourselves, has been the secret of this marginal Hellenist's astonishing and unprecedented success in the Anglo-American literary world?

II.

Constantine Petrou Photiades Cavafy was born, the youngest of seven brothers, in Alexandria, on April 29, 1863. His ancestry, in which he took great pride, included several distinguished Phanariots, that is, high Greek officials in the service of the Ottoman government and the Patriarchate at Constantinople. Many Phanariots boasted of their illustrious Byzantine ancestry, and several of Cavafy's poems show a strong emotional sympathy with the aristocratic emperor (and subsequent monastic theologian) John VI Kantakouzenos, who reigned in the fourteenth century. This is not the kind of background liable to produce strong Marathonian instincts. In an early poem Cavafy paid lavish (and I suspect tongue-in-cheek) tribute to all those upright souls who set themselves to guard Thermopylae, quietly undercutting their stance with the acknowledgment that in the end—patriotic virtue notwithstanding—the Medes will always break through.

Cavafy's center was never in the Greek homeland. When, in his poem "In Church," his thoughts turn "to the great glories of our race," he is not thinking of Periclean Athens. He is stirred, rather, by what Mendelsohn translates as "our illustrious Byzantinism." It is the Byzantine patrician in Cavafy that we hear when he remarks, cuttingly, as quoted by E. M. Forster: "Aristocracy in modern Greece? To be an aristocrat there is to have made a corner in coffee in Piraeus in 1849."

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Cavafy's father preferred to make his corner in exporting Egyptian cotton, successfully enough to run a large luxurious home in the most fashionable quarter of Alexandria, and to move, with his wife Charicleia, in the city's smartest social circles. Then, in 1870, unexpectedly and prematurely, he died. His eldest sons, inexperienced in the business, made unwise investments, and a hemorrhage of capital left them unable to maintain their Alexandrian lifestyle. In 1872 the family moved to England, where Cavafy & Co. had offices. But by 1876 the situation was so bad that the company had to be liquidated, and a year later Charicleia brought her brood back to Alexandria, now as impoverished apartment-dwellers in the city where once they enjoyed both wealth and cosmopolitan social status. Young Constantine was nine years old at the time: the transience of happiness, nostalgia for lost greatness, stoic resignation—these were strong emotions seared into his mind at a highly impressionable age. To Forster, years later, he remarked, "Pray, my dear Forster, oh pray, that you never lose your capital." That one came from the heart.

Anglicized, and schooled, in Liverpool and London, a *déclassé* polyglot bookworm with poetic yearnings, Cavafy was to spend most of the rest of his life in Alexandria. Though he knew virtually no Arabic, and counted no Egyptians among his friends (even his rent-boys would seem to have belonged to the large Greek community), the city became his home and, eventually, one of his most haunting symbols. Urban to the core, Cavafy took no interest in scenery. Convalescing—shortly before his death—in Kifissia, a northern suburb of Athens, with a stunning panorama visible beyond his window, including the mountains of Parnes and Pendeli in the background, his only comment on the view was: "It bores me." What held his heart were the shabby streets, the rundown cafés and billiard halls, the cheap rooms (linked indelibly in memory with sex long past but never forgotten) of the Greek quarter. Not even his one youthful expedition to Constantinople, where he had his first physical homoerotic experience, was preferable. Refusing an invitation to Athens, he wrote: "Mohammed Aly Square is my aunt. Rue Cherif Pasha is my first cousin, and the Rue de Ramleh my second. How can I leave them?"

Until her death in 1899 he lived with his mother, whom he referred to affectionately (and accurately, to judge from surviving photographs) as "the Fat One." He finally settled in an apartment over a brothel at 10 Rue Lepsius (re-christened the Rue Clapsius by wartime troops). There, surrounded by a hodgepodge of old furniture, rugs, vases, and endless bric-a-brac, which reminded one Greek friend of a secondhand furniture store, Cavafy spent the rest of his life: working mornings as a clerk for the Egyptian Third Circle of Irrigation; entertaining chosen friends by dim candlelight (an especially beautiful face would get the silent tribute of an extra candle); reading

Jean Kefallinos, *Cavafy*, 1921

voraciously in Hellenistic and Byzantine history; mulling over his own and the Hellenic diaspora's past until they became indistinguishable in his mind; calling up nocturnal visions of historical charmers, former lovers, and himself when young; writing and circulating the poems that would one day make him famous.

He hated growing old (though the laryngeal cancer that killed him was due to his lifelong addiction to cigarettes). Even his earliest poems testify to this obsession. He persisted in handing out photographs of himself taken years before. He dyed his hair. The melancholy that he ascribes to a fictitious poet in Commagene in the year 595—"The aging of my body and my looks / is a wound from a terrible knife"—must surely reflect his own pain, and the transient, youth-obsessed nature of the relationships he so memorably celebrated. And the poem's end—"Bring on your drugs, Art of Poetry, / which make it impossible—for a while—to feel the wound"—reveals, with stoic clarity, one of the driving forces behind his work. Seferis contended that outside his poetry Cavafy was completely uninteresting, did not exist, and Mendelsohn's investigation of the poet's life leads him to a very similar conclusion. Yet at least in a psychological sense, Cavafy's life is surely one of extraordinary interest, and not only because of the poetry it generated.

The traditional account of Cavafy's literary development, sketched out by Seferis and largely followed by Mendelsohn, goes like this. As an eager young *littérateur* and Orthodox Christian, overly conscious of his Phanariot ancestry, well read in Hellenistic and Byzantine history, writing reviews and essays as well as verse, and struggling to find his own poetic voice, Cavafy was an ordinary and even undistinguished figure. Heavily influenced by the Parnassian movement of the 1860s onward, he embraced the cause of Art for Art's Sake (a concept he never abandoned), and particularly its harking back to ancient Mediterranean models. Then came Baudelaire and Symbolism, the idea of the poet as belonging to a rarefied and enchanted elite, and the mild dottiness (shared by Yeats) that dabbled in second sight, telepathy, and extrasensory perception. The aesthetic of the Esoterics and the Decadents added an exotic relish, and encouraged Cavafy's anti-industrial, retrospective nostalgia for the past.

But then, in Seferis's words, "something extraordinary happens." With so private a person it is hard to be specific, but it would seem that from about 1890 onward Cavafy was struggling with a number of internal conflicts, intellectual, emotional, and erotic. He had begun to read Gibbon, whose humanist ironies attracted him, but whose contempt for Byzantium and its religion he found profoundly antipathetic. He was undergoing a sexual crisis—perhaps precipitated in part by the death of his mother (the same period witnessed the deaths of half a dozen other relatives, as well as those

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of two good friends)—which resulted, from about 1916 onward, in a far more open and explicit treatment of homosexuality in his work.

This psychological turning point, dated by Cavafy himself to 1911, had been preceded by a ruthless pruning and weeding out, based on what he termed a "philosophic scrutiny," of his existing work. Cavafy now repudiated many of his early pieces, or at best allowed them to survive unpublished. (Mendelsohn, ignoring Cavafy's verdict, has included them all, the repudiated as well as the unpublished.) It was at this moment, we are told, that Cavafy, as a poet, rose from mediocrity to greatness. Hitherto, the argument runs, he had been just another *fin de siècle* literary versifier, with strong, if deeply concealed, Wildean passions. A comparison is regularly made with Proust, who, in Mendelsohn's words, "similarly underwent a profound but invisible metamorphosis that, by his late forties, had transformed him from a dabbling littérateur into a major artist."

This parallel is reinforced by the undoubted truth—Mendelsohn is absolutely right here—that, as with Proust, "Cavafy's one great subject, the element that unites virtually all of his work, is Time." But otherwise the notion of Cavafy re-inventing himself in middle age (he was almost fifty in 1911) comes up against an interesting and significant obstacle. There is fairly general agreement as to what constitute his best, and best-known, poems: the lists will almost always include "The City" (1894), "Waiting for the Barbarians" (1898), "Thermopylae" (1901), "Ithaca" (1910), "The God Abandons Antony" (1910), and "Alexandrian Kings" (1912). The only possible later poem that might qualify for entry to this list is "Young Men of Sidon (400 A.D.)" (1920), and even that is debatable. In other words, most of the poems for which Cavafy has become famous were conceived *before* the metamorphosis that allegedly turned him into a great poet.

What are we to make of this? It would seem that the idea of Cavafy as a mysterious late bloomer is greatly exaggerated. True, much of what he wrote early on was poor stuff; the same is true of many great poets. Yet he also produced, while still in his thirties, at least three of the great poems by which he first won wide recognition. They heralded the appearance of a new and unique voice in European literature: quiet, reflective, philosophical, but at the same time disconcertingly subversive of age-old conventional wisdom. For two millennia the West had seen Rome as the bastion of civilization against encroaching barbarism. In "Waiting for the Barbarians"—a title that has passed into the language as a euphemism for a kind of enervated acceptance of defeat—we instead see emperor, consuls, praetors, orators, all in their finest attire, passively, indeed eagerly, expecting the arrival of these crude but energetic outsiders. Nothing could better symbolize the played-out and decadent quality of an *ancien régime*. When the rumor of their coming proves to be false, the news is greeted not with jubilation, but with despair: "And now what's to become of us without barbarians? / These people were a solution of a sort."

"Ithaca" looks, at first sight, to be less disruptive of accepted ideas, a haunting discourse on the old proverb that it is better to travel hopefully than to arrive. The addressee in the poem is famously exhorted to make the trip a lifelong one, in summer mornings to "put in to harbors new to your eyes," to buy exotic goods, to gain wisdom from Egyptian sages. But look again. The original, iconic traveler to Ithaca was Odysseus, and his goal was return to his kingdom, to reunite with his wife Penelope. He wanted home. When he stretched the journey out, it was mostly in the arms of other women. He had trouble with the Cyclops, with the Laestrygonians, with Poseidon. But for Cavafy, the Ithaca-bound traveler will avoid all these "so long as your thoughts remain lofty." This cannot be said of Odysseus's thoughts. And when Cavafy's traveler finally makes it to Ithaca, the little island "has nothing left to give you." Penelope and home have been silently written out of the picture. "Ithaca gave you the beautiful journey" is the poem's most unforgettable and plangent line. We forget that, for Cavafy, Ithaca can give you nothing else. "Ithaca" gained a certain sort of worldwide fame when, in 1994, Maurice Tempelsman read it, very movingly, at the funeral of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. I have always wondered which of its multiple implications he had in mind.

III.

These poems have a significant feature in common, which, considering the aspect of Cavafy's work that is currently most emphasized, should be of particular interest today. In 1927, he identified three main thematic areas in his poetry: the historical, the philosophical (in which he clearly included the didactic), and the sensuous, of which by far the largest sub-division was the erotic. These categories regularly overlapped. Of the poems listed above, five qualify as didactic, and four as historical—but unless we count the "voluptuous perfumes" of "Ithaca" ("heady," in Mendelsohn's version), not one of them, by any stretch of the imagination, could be categorized as sensuous, let alone erotic. The clear conclusion would appear to be that his "metamorphosis" was closely bound up with Cavafy's remarkable emergence, in the last two decades of his life, as a brilliant pioneer in the poetic portrayal—precise, often matter-of-fact, always psychologically acute—of homoerotic passion.

Yet a close inspection of the published corpus of the "canon" shows that this emergence turns out to have been cautious to a degree—not surprisingly, given the hostility of the Palamas clique, and the still stringent laws against homosexuality. The unidentified longings (*epithymies*) in the poem of that name, in 1904, go unfulfilled. The student Myrtias declares in "Dangerous" (1911): "My body I will give to pleasures, / to diversions that I've dreamed of, / to the most daring erotic desires, / to the lustful impulses of my blood"—but we are not told what they are. When we do begin to get unmistakably erotic scenes, in a series of poems from 1914 onward (many protected by their historical setting), Cavafy's Greek again and again cunningly leaves the gender of his characters indeterminate, in a way that English, which is ineluctably gender-specific, cannot replicate.

As a result, Anglo-American translations tend to give the false impression that Cavafy's open references to homosexuality are considerably more frequent than was in fact the case. First-person narratives (except for those using a historical persona) avoid explicit homoeroticism: "Body Remember" (1918) is a good example. "To Pleasure" (1917) disclaims interest in "any routine enjoyment of desire," but that is the nearest we come to an open declaration. That this reticence was calculated becomes obvious when we turn to the unpublished and unfinished collections, where the situation is very different. There Cavafy (or his first-person persona) speaks openly again and again (yet the sex of the beloved often remains obscure). A pair of such poems describe visits to brothels. In one, "On the Stairs" (1904), two clients exchange sad glances as they pass: "Our bodies sensed and sought each other out; our blood and skin understood. / But we hid from each other, we two, terrified." The other, "And I Got Down And I Lay There in Their Beds" (1915), sheds an interesting, if ambiguous, light on Cavafy's sense of himself as an artist:

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The rooms I went to were the secret
ones,
the ones they think it shameful even
to name.
But for me there was no shame—
for if there were
what kind of poet, what kind of
craftsman would I be?
Better to abstain completely. That
would be more in keeping,
much more in keeping with my poetry
than going to the common parlor for
my pleasure.

But all his life he seesawed between self-restraint (he wrote agonized notes to himself about masturbation) and the full acceptance of sensual pleasure as the matrix of his creative genius, with the latter generally winning. As he wrote in "Comprehension" (1918):

In the dissolute life I led in my youth
my poetry's designs took shape;
the boundaries of my art were drawn.

That is why regrets were never firm.
And my resolutions—to master myself,
to change—
would keep up for two weeks at the
most.

For that irresolution we should be eternally grateful. In a series of vividly etched vignettes, Cavafy gave memorable and public expression to a world of deep but transient passions that had hitherto lacked any true voice, let alone so remarkable a poetic endorsement. Intensely, almost exclusively, physical, fleeing the realities of family or daily life (Cavafy notes one youth's mended underwear without thinking to ask himself who mended it), these phosphorescent mayfly relationships envisage no future beyond the sexual epiphany itself. Loss, separation, and nostalgia follow. Beauty fades, but preferably somewhere else. I cannot see Cavafy's protagonists holding out for same-sex marriage.

Owing to the special circumstances surrounding the development of Cavafy's erotic poems, there has always been a temptation to treat them as an independent phenomenon, something apart from his ironic musings on the vicissitudes of Alexandrian, Byzantine, or classical history. Nothing could be further from the truth. As Edmund Keeley, one of Cavafy's best translators and interpreters, has remarked, Cavafy's whole corpus constitutes "a collection of historical epiphanies in verse." Like Proust, Cavafy set out to capture significant moments from the past. His *temps retrouvé* embraced ancient kings and modern working youths. Beauty, passion, devotion, the perfection of a youthful profile, the incandescent moments of one's early twenties: all were as evanescent—and in the same way—as the crumbling dynasties and historical failures of antiquity. (Cavafy would surely have endorsed Auden's famous, and later repudiated, aphorism: "History to the defeated / may say Alas but cannot help or pardon.") The retrieval of these epiphanies, by recourse to texts, statues, photographs, or treasured personal memories, was the best one could hope for. Even the parting of young lovers forever has its plus side: they will remember each other as the exquisite twenty-somethings they were at the moment of separation.

Despite his pragmatic ironies and his bare-bones verse, Cavafy can thus be seen as a crypto-romantic, whose worship of the flesh sometimes (as translators know to their cost) can slip into sentimental cliché, and who, for all his repeated assertion that he was a poet-historian, could not—any more than some other modern advocates—resist the temptation to redesign Graeco-Roman antiquity, complete with fictional case-histories, as a dreamworld in which homoeroticism was the norm. Yet these remain minor flaws in a most powerful and consistent worldview. Cavafy is the supreme modern poet of nostalgia, of the brevity and the transience of all human aspirations and affections. More stoic than Thomas Nashe, he knows brightness will fall from the air, but sets himself to catch it in a ring of words before it fades.

When we survey Cavafy's wide-ranging historical and religious themes, a very interesting fact emerges. He is regularly described as a marginalist. Seferis, again, set the tone: "His world is located on the edges of places, men, and ages." But in a literary sense he began at the familiar center, and only progressively moved further out. Odysseus and Ithaca, Achilles' horses, the death of Sarpedon, a Trojan lament: all these would be familiar to readers of Homer (the repudiated poems contain similar items). His first expansion into the Hellenistic world came by way of Plutarch's *Lives*, still reasonably familiar territory for the educated. But the more the voracious autodidact explored the world of the Seleucids and Ptolemies, and the medieval byways of Byzantinism (surely the most esoteric subject matter out of which great poetry was ever made), and what he described in "Philhellene" (1912) as the dubiously Hellenic regions "behind the Zágros, beyond Phráata," the further he departed from any mythic or historical context immediately appreciable by the non-specialist, and the longer and more frequent Mendelsohn's excellent explanatory notes have to grow, sometimes morphing into extended commentaries.

Except when these later poems have a touch of emotional universalism—as in, say, the use of colored glass for jewels at the coronation of the penniless John Kantakouzenos—they are not the stuff that generates worldwide popularity. It seems increasingly clear that what first established Cavafy's extraordinary reputation was a nexus of his famous early poems, and what confirmed it was his unique new genre of homoerotic vignettes, some of the best of which have emerged, comparatively recently, from the unpublished and unfinished work that he left behind at his death.

Every autodidact, someone once claimed, can be guaranteed to have a bee in his bonnet somewhere, and this was certainly true of Cavafy, whose bee (pursued in no less than a dozen poems, five of them unfinished) was the improbable figure of Julian the Apostate. It might be thought that a poet who glimpsed the old gods winging it over Ionia would welcome an emperor who aimed to put them back officially on their pedestals; but in fact Cavafy reveals a visceral distaste and contempt for Julian. G. W. Bowersock, in two characteristically erudite and incisive essays in his wonderful new collection *From Gibbon To Auden: Essays on the Classical Tradition*, pinpoints exactly why. The poet was at some pains, on accepting his homosexuality, to reconcile it with his Christianity by assuming a tolerant world where "pagans and Christians could associate easily with one another in unhindered pursuit of the sensual life. It was the avowed aim of Julian, the ascetic

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pagan, to put an end to all that." Exactly. Julian is skewered as humorless, pompous, hypocritical, and ridiculous. But Cavafy is also, in an erotic sense, Sir Toby Belch confronting Malvolio: "Dost think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?" It is enjoyable to see this professional ironist, for once, shaken out of his ironic detachment and going for the jugular.

IV.

Discussing the problems facing him as Cavafy's translator, Mendelsohn remarks in his introduction, quite correctly, that "it is by now a commonplace that Cavafy's language, because it generally shuns common poetic devices—image, simile, metaphor, specialized diction—is tantamount to prose." This notion (like so much else) goes back to Seferis and has encouraged more than one translator in the belief that turning it into English would therefore be comparatively simple. In fact, Cavafy's language is something rich and strange. It was brilliantly described by Patrick Leigh Fermor as "a unique and cunning alloy in which the fragments of legal diction and ancient Greek and inscriptions on tombs and old chronicles . . . are closely haunted by the *Anthology* and the Septuagint; it is contained in a medium demotic perversely stiffened with mandarin and beaten at last into an instrument of expression which is austere and frugal in the extreme." Much of this intricate complexity has been ignored, not only by largely Greekless critics such as Auden, but also, unfortunately, by more than one translator.

There is also a vague public assumption, first started by Forster, who should have known better, that Cavafy never uses rhyme. This is completely untrue. Many of his poems (including a number of sonnets) have complex, and in a few cases really *recherché*, rhyme schemes. How many English readers, I wonder, know that so familiar a work as "The City" is constructed, in the Greek, round an ABBCCDDA stanzaic pattern? Like Italian (to Dante's great benefit), modern Greek has a huge range of inflected terminal homophones, increased still further, since late antiquity, by the progressive reduction of vowels (*u*, *ê*) and diphthongs (*oi*, *ei*) to the *ee* sound of modern iota, a shift known as iotacization. Just how easy this makes rhyming can be seen from a tour de force such as "A Great Feast at the House of Sosibius" (1917), in which all the rhymes are not only homophones but also actual puns: *lian* / *leian*, *kôpê* / *kopoi*, and so on. It is only too easy to see why translators into English have for the most part silently discarded these exotica; but the result has created a measurable gap between Cavafy's original text and what most Western readers are offered in its place.

We have a great deal to thank Daniel Mendelsohn for. He has provided us—especially through the inclusion of versions of the thirty poems still in draft form—with as complete a Cavafy collection as we are ever likely to get. His notes are full, accurate, and always helpful; and his theoretical understanding of Cavafy's metrics was badly needed, and shows subtle insights. (Who before him ever bothered to point out that the questions in "Waiting for the Barbarians" are all written in the old-fashioned fifteeners popular in Greek demotic songs—and familiar to us from George Chapman's Homer—whereas the answers come in crisp, tight tragic iambics?) In a few illuminating pages Mendelsohn shows how Cavafy used different meters to highlight dejection, disappointment, or frustrated desire: how in a line suggesting Nero's self-indulgent excesses he pads out the five-beat rhythm with five extra syllables. He skillfully traces the cunning juxtapositions of demotic, mandarin, and classical Greek. He has carefully sorted the various stages of composition and circulation that the poet went through (Cavafy never regarded any work, even when published, as absolutely final). He even highlights Cavafy's use of puns to create emotional linkage: the heart of the wretched young man in "The City" is "buried" (*thamenê*), and in the next line his mind "will remain" (*tha menei*) stuck in its current morass.

As a critic and an exegete of Cavafy, Mendelsohn ranks with the best. Unfortunately, when he sets about putting all this theoretical knowledge to practical use, he does not do as well. His translations, for all his expert metrical knowledge (and sometimes, I suspect, because of it), have an oddly flat and constrained quality. His iambic imitations do not feel rhythmically comfortable, and to my mind he gives up far too easily in his search for rhymes, offering instead "off-rhymes, assonance, consonance, and slant-rhymes when strict rhymes were difficult to achieve in English." His laudable aim is to let the reader "feel the formal elements of Cavafy's verse," but the actual result not only fails to do this, but unintentionally creates a series of jarring irritations. He is, predictably, at his best in the unrhymed poems of emotion:

> Body, remember not just how much
> you were loved,
> not just the beds where you have lain,
> but also those longings that so openly
> glistened for you in eyes,
> and trembled in voices—and some
> chance obstacle arose and thwarted
> them.
> Now that it's all finally in the past
> it almost seems as if you gave
> yourself to
> those longings too—remember how
> they glistened, in eyes that looked
> at you;
> how they trembled in voices, for you;
> remember, body.

Yet even here there are avoidable flaws—the flat shift of Cavafy's careful "in the voice" to "in voices," of "how they glistened, / remember" to the prosaic "remember how / they glistened," eyes that "looked" rather than "gazed."

At least as far as Cavafy's "canon" of 154 sanctioned poems is concerned, it seems likely that the long-established version by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard, together with Evangelos Sachperoglou's more recent bilingual edition for the Oxford World's Classics series, will continue, deservedly, to hold the field. Where Mendelsohn will remain indispensable is for his thorough critical annotations, and—for the time being, at least—for his first-time translations of

Resurrection of John Keats

First, brace yourself. The romantic is back,
feet propped, convalescing from the fiction
of an interventionist god. Tough journey.
Long. Oxymoronic lovechild of nature
and art, tell it slant on that red guitar:

that nightingale is not a bird. It's a folio
of Homer, a cashcow on fire. So notch up
your amulet of pain, living hand lanced,
then outstretched, clearance finally given
to the lover, who, outfitted with a conscience,

heretofore dead (how like a god), has just spoken
the world's first sentence, distinct as a hiccup,
in response to the tubercular prognosis: *Hello*.
O Hyperion, Fanny breathed, this is *that* new.
Beauty ungovernable, m'lord, because true.

VIRGINIA KONCHAN

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the "unfinished" poems. "Unfinished" is, in fact, a misleading description, since (as opposed to the papyrologists, who thrive on supplementing lacunae) Lavagnini had in each case at least one, and often several, complete drafts to work from. Her task was not to fill gaps, but to decide between endless scribbled corrections, between alternative lines or phrases. Even so, her "ultimate texts" (*teleftaia keimena*), as she well knew, remain hypothetical recreations. (For this reason, and given the general inaccessibility of Lavagnini's Greek *keimena*, it is hard to understand why Mendelsohn's slim volume was not—like Keeley-Sherrard, like Sachperoglou—first published as a bilingual.)

The "unfinished" poems themselves will bring no radical surprises—indeed, they will bring a considerable sense of *déjà lu*—to those familiar with the "canon." The only mildly astonishing discovery is perhaps the degree to which Julian figured as Cavafy's particular bugbear during the last decade of his life. No less than five pieces deal with the Apostate, including a spooky borrowing from Procopius's *Secret History* that has him wandering round the palace at night minus his head, and thus clearly a demon in disguise. Several poems wittily target degenerate Ptolemies or Seleucids: the obese Ptolemy known as Potbelly, Antiochus Cyzicenus who played with giant marionettes. A smart young Italian studying rhetoric in Smyrna muses on his debts and parties while a famous sophist waxes emotional over a famous incident in the battle of Marathon. Gentle fun is poked at the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus (they fall asleep again from boredom while being harangued in the new Christian world). "Remorse" and "Nothing about the Lacedaemonians" both feature a speaker advising the avoidance of excessive sincerity or self-blame: which side the poet is on remains artfully ambiguous.

Some of these poems are tartly effective. They come across, like most of Cavafy's late work, as clever rather than inspired. The best of them are the modern erotica, which constitute about a third of the whole. Both "Birth of a Poem" and "It must have been the spirits" highlight Cavafy's remarkable ability to conjure up, from past random memories, passion recollected in anything but tranquillity. "The Photograph" and "The Item in the Paper" stress the powerful hostility, name-calling, and contempt directed, by newspapers and public opinion, against "degenerates" and "deviants," together with a resolute determination on the part of their targets not to "let any foolish shame / get in the way of their love."

For me, however, the most delightful, the most truly Cavafian, of the new poems is "Abandonment," in which an elegant young socialite refuses to treat being dumped as "some great tragedy":

> After all when his friend had said to
> him, "We two
> will have love forever"—both the one
> who said it,
> and the one who heard it, knew it for
> a cliché. . . .
>
> He was far too elegant, and far too
> clever,
> to take the matter tragically;
> and far too beautiful—both face and
> body—
> for his carnal vanity to be touched at all.

That does not possess the universalism of the great early poems; but in its elegant irony, its rueful realism, and its wry humor, it remains a brilliant miniature, and we are lucky to have it. The old Alexandrian's reactions are always hard to predict; but in whatever afterlife he and his straw hat have ended up—still, of course, at a slight angle to the universe—I think he might be pleased at the way his reputation has fared. As Mendelsohn rightly observes, with the addition of these poems "his work has, at last, been truly finished." ◆

David Thomson
MARVELOUSLY SELFISH

KAZAN ON DIRECTING
Edited and with commentary
by Robert Cornfield
(Knopf, 368 pp., $32.50)

If anyone wants to make the case for Elia Kazan as one of the outstanding twentieth-century Americans, there is a famous text to call in support. I refer to *A Life*, Kazan's autobiography, published in 1988 at 848 pages (it was cut to make it a reasonable length), and one of the most forceful and engrossing books ever written about a life in the arts or show business. It came with Kazan not just alert still, but deeply concerned about self-justification; and so it took on his enemies and their grounds for disliking him, and shows not an atom of shame in describing his lust, his competitiveness, and the wolfish way in which "Gadge" (he was nicknamed for his ability to make things and machines work) could also manipulate most life situations to his advantage. It was a book made out of the confessions and boasts of a director who could not always tell drama from melodrama.

By 1947, Elia Kazan, not yet forty, held a unique position: he had put *A Streetcar Named Desire* on stage and had made a movie, *Gentleman's Agreement*, that won the Oscar for Best Picture. That movie is earnest about its good intentions to the point of boredom; it doesn't feel like Kazan now. But in *Streetcar* he changed the way people looked at the South, at sex, and at modern manhood. At the same time (with Robert Jones and Cheryl Crawford) he founded an entire system of acting—the one we call the Method or the Actors Studio style. (Lee Strasberg came along a little later and took it over.) Yet *A Life* makes it clear that Kazan was more than a director. He always wanted to be the center of the whole work, to be the artist, and this led him in later life to write several ordinary but successful novels. He was a calculating, unfaithful womanizer. He was a radical, and a member of the Communist Party for about fifteen months, and then a second-guesser to the cause. In person, he was a life force, appealing but tough, close to ugly, inspiring yet very insecure, and like all creative people whose work is not primary he was forever thinking anxiously that he had not done well enough.

Well, Kazan is gone now—he lived from 1909 to 2003—and this book is a natural way of celebrating his centenary. Kazan kept notes on all his productions, stage and film, and they have been edited to make a book that can shed light on what directors do. It may be that a great biography of Kazan is yet to come—Richard Schickel made a decent attempt in 2005, but seemed intimidated by the scale and the fervor of *A Life* and did not seek to rival it; and Jeff Young published a useful book in 1999 that was drawn from Kazan's lectures on his own films. So where does *Kazan on Directing* fit? I'm not sure, and I'm not reassured by its clunky apparatus—Kazan's own writing

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is edited and contained in Robert Cornfield's narrative, but there is also a foreword by John Lahr plus a preface by Martin Scorsese urging us to take the book seriously—when everyone is saying under their breath, if you really want to know Kazan you need to read *A Life*.

But open this book up and the problematic man and the intense, pointed gadget come alive again. I don't know why it should be, but the first half of the book—on theater—is far and away the best. Let it be said that the book allows twenty-five pages on the stage production of *A Streetcar Named Desire* and only eight-and-a-half pages on the movie. Moreover, the notes on the stage *Streetcar* amplify as well as anything yet published the degree to which Kazan changed that play as he worked on it.

To put the production in a nutshell: Kazan was nothing but heterosexual. He could understand, at some level, the homosexual fantasy in the play; and Tennessee Williams was exact about the need to poeticize every object and garment on stage. He knew that it was a play about Blanche DuBois. He saw clearly that Stanley Kowalski was secondary—a wrench applied with brute force to get his sister-in-law and her airs out of his house. But Kazan could not identify with Blanche, and he could not resist the imaginative resonance of Marlon Brando. And so, with varying degrees of self-awareness and immersion, he shifted the balance. Here are some of Kazan's notes, talking himself into boosting Stanley, like a second urging his fighter forward:

> One of the important things about Stanley is that Blanche would wreck his home.... He's got the things the way he wants them around there, and he does not want them upset by a phony, corrupt, sick, destructive woman. This makes Stanley right! Are we going into the age of Stanley?... Stanley is exactly like you in some ways [Kazan means himself]. He is supremely indifferent to everything except his own pleasure and comfort. He is marvelously selfish, a miracle of sensuous self-centredness.

In passages like that, and in the overall treatment of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Death of a Salesman*, *Camino Real*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and *Sweet Bird of Youth* on stage, we hear and feel the Kazan of *A Life* and we gain insight into those plays. It may be added that Kazan was really not suited to the work of Tennessee Williams. But that objection is too late now: the opening night of *Streetcar* made the playwright, just as it established Marlon Brando. And who played Blanche? Jessica Tandy! (She was replaced for the film by the starrier Vivien Leigh.) I should also note (this is not in the book), that Kazan's leaning on Stanley included the director having an affair with Kim Hunter, the actress playing Stella, Mrs. Kowalski.

So far so good. But in a career in which Kazan's own excitement shifted from stage to screen, his notes on the films are far less readable and far less stimulating. Consider this book's treatment of *East of Eden*, made in 1954. I pick that film because it is one of the best-known pictures Kazan ever made, and because it was and remains a hit. Having cost about $1.6 million, it had first-run rentals of $5 million—and it still plays regularly on television. You can attribute its lasting popularity to the fact that it is one of James Dean's only three films, but Kazan was not a bystander in that process. He discovered Dean for the movie. He encouraged and fussed over the very difficult kid. More than that, he shifted the balance of the Steinbeck saga to showcase Dean (and to demonstrate how Dean and Kazan were blood brothers). It has always been a successful film because it is a genuinely powerful melodrama—even if it may leave the adult viewer a little shame-faced over his or her tears.

In *Kazan on Directing*, the section on *East of Eden* begins with Kazan's testimony: "*East of Eden* is more personal to me; it is my own story." If you hear warning signals there, keep your head down. Robert Cornfield then offers the storyline of the movie. That seems like a basic task, and Cornfield's version is accurate enough—until he says that Kate (Jo Van Fleet), the mother and brothelkeeper in Monterey discovered by farmboy Cal (Dean), from Salinas, "has no sentimental interest in this son."

Now, that's not the film I have always seen. The misty morning sequence in Monterey where Cal follows Kate is one of the greatest passages of film in Kazan—it uses color and CinemaScope with daring beauty, and it hints at delicate ties between the two people. Each one is mysteriously seduced by the other. Kate may wish that Cal had never turned up. She may be confused, torn, angry, and horrified. But if you think that there is no "sentimental interest," then there must be very different of ways of watching a movie pass on the screen. Cornfield notes that color and Scope were new for Kazan, but he gives little account of what the director does with them, and this is owed to a crucial error in this book: the notion that "directing" means handling actors and plot, and not camera, light, space, movement, color, and rhythm.

ANTHONY RUSSO

Moving on to Cornfield's description of how Kazan altered (or slaughtered) the Steinbeck novel: this is backed up by a self-serving and not very pleasant letter from Kazan to Steinbeck himself. The movie of *East of Eden* cut a potential ten-hour picture down to two hours. It omits the early warring between Kate and her husband Aron. It dumps the Chinese house servant Lee, who, for good and ill, serves the novel as a benign intermediary. All of this is collapsed into the story of Cal, Aron, Adam, and Abra. (Adam is Cal's brother and Abra is Adam's girlfriend.)

But the letter from Kazan to Steinbeck—which has the purpose of easing Steinbeck off the picture, so that a hired scriptwriter can do Kazan's bidding—makes clear the extra stress put on Cal in the film. You may say that this was because Kazan had discovered Dean and his potential—things hardly assisted by casting the pallid Dick Davalos as the "nice" brother Adam. I suspect that Dean's raw ability crept up on Kazan, but there is also another reason for emphasizing Cal, and it is one that dogs Kazan's work: he needed a hero he could identify with, a character who carries the director's own fantasy energy to the screen.

It is a measure of Kazan's charm and persuasiveness, and of the mood that he established in which he was the maker of these works, that he was able to pull such shifts. But make no mistake: it was Kazan the director who hacked at Steinbeck's novel until it became a film about a dark, resentful, self-pitying kid. If you feel that such a conclusion is too strong, look at the film again and see how far Dean's genius (massaged by Kazan's care) makes the unpleasant Cal into a sentimental hero. Yet as this book's account of the film goes on, the notes show Kazan lamenting the film for the very things he had forced into it: "Don't let him off easy. In *East of Eden*, you let Dean off easy. Therefore the end is false!... Sentimentality is the enemy of drama.... It is the sister of self-pity." Amen to all that—but what is it that prevents Kazan from seeing that no one bears guilt for this failure as much as the director? It's as if Kazan had to make these stories about himself, but then backed off from the necessary judgment that follows.

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This is the place to add that *East of Eden* followed *On the Waterfront*, which in turn followed Kazan's decision to name names to the House Committee on Un-American Activities in 1952. This book leaves that great crisis to an afterword, as if to say it has been done to death. That is not quite good enough. Kazan himself knew that the crisis would never fade away, which is why so much of *A Life* is devoted to it. Indeed, I would argue that Kazan's artistic identity as a filmmaker took wing with his testimony, because it freed him to identify with dark outsiders like Cal. After all, Cal is Cain, and *East of Eden* is a picture that teaches the father to appreciate Cain as the "good" son.

So, in the end, the section on *East of Eden* in *Kazan on Directing* is flawed by the decision just to reprint things Kazan said without generating a proper analysis of what goes into the picture. Blind to composition or to the subtlety of Jo Van Fleet's performance, the book misses *East of Eden* as an authentic 1950s melodrama, a women's picture for boys—a weepie in which the object of sorrow (for us and for himself) is the teenage boy. As such its mastery is close to what Kazan intended deep down: it was a hit, and it helped to prove his uncanny ability with newcomers, and with the kind of pained psychological originality that Dean possessed. (Cornfield quotes Kazan as saying that Dean got a scene right 95 per cent of the time—or never got it right! Those odds sound like phenomenal acting to me, but this only throws into question Cornfield's other assertion that Kazan "made" the performance.)

Alas, this book is not as helpful as one might wish on the intimacy at which Kazan excelled: getting an actor to find himself in a part. We hear that on *East of Eden*, he deliberately set James Dean and Raymond Massey to hating each other, and we may accept that unkind ploy for the sake of the film. But that story has been told many times before. There is next to nothing new on how Kazan soothed and propelled Dean into his greatest performance. So this may be a good time to look back on the Actors Studio style. Kazan was always its greatest example, its meal ticket. Starting in the 1930s, when he was an actor with the Group Theatre, he reacted against the effete stylization of English acting. He called for a muscular, authentic, hesitant American truth, and he was prepared to base it in the teachings of Konstantin Stanislavsky, though the real test was movies that flourished and made stars of the actors. Kazan was a godfather-like figure to Clift, Brando, and Dean, and he was the director for Lee J. Cobb, Karl Malden, Rod Steiger, and so many others in a tradition that does not stop with Pacino, De Niro, and Sean Penn.

That way of acting in movies revolutionized their world, but in time it led to formulaic heartfelt confessions of the inner self in every trite episodic drama on television. The audience could not stomach so much "truth," and the style risked—no, crossed the line into—self-parody, as witness so many recent huff-and-puff performances from Pacino as versions of Satan, and the stately self-congratulation of *Inside the Actors Studio*, a series that has included many players who were never close to the Method as well as a host, James Lipton, locked into the old English tradition. Of course, the Studio and its influence coincided with the 1950s movie, live TV drama, and a very self-conscious stress on American maleness. (The Method is not as convincing when it deals with actresses.) It relied on writers such as Williams, Arthur Miller, William Inge, and Paddy Chayefsky.

It had its moment and it left a rich legacy. But in theater and in film, we have begun to tire of its mannerisms. Naturalism is on the wane, and dramatists as varied as Beckett, Pinter, and Ayckbourn have been better served by old-fashioned pretending than by Strasbergian authenticity. The first two parts of *The Godfather* may be the best monument to the Method and to Kazan, just as much as *A Streetcar Named Desire* or *Death of a Salesman*; and they show how far the Method promoted a kind of sinister, taciturn machismo—a justified male self-pity that covers Terry in *On the Waterfront*, Cal in *East of Eden,* and Michael Corleone's stricken authority. Kazan could have played Hyman Roth as well as Lee Strasberg played him. The future health of film and theater in America may depend on the recognition of adventure and variety in acting. The truth is that Brando was pretending, in the classical pre-Method way, in *The Godfather* and also in several other movies, where he seemed irked and ill-served by the great load of sincerity. Acting, we have learned, is as close to lying as it is to truth.

Kazan's movies are hijacked by their dark heroes and their unamused point of view. Their failure to step back, to see other lives as being as worthy and as foolish as the central life (*Wild River* is an exception) is what plunges Kazan into melodrama instead of drama. That is why so many of his films date badly and leave the neurotic detail of the central performance as stranded as special pleading. Kazan could see no alternative to psychological discovery in acting, but he turned it into a stale habit. More than fifty years later, the deliberately "flat" acting in the films of Robert Bresson—*Diary of a Country Priest*, *A Man Escaped*, and *Pickpocket*, all films of the 1950s—seems so much more seductive and mysterious, and such a surer lead to a vision of the larger world. Kazan glorified the actor in the way the Romantic movement did the poet and the composer. But we can now see the actor as a model for the trickster, the fraud, the impersonator.

East of Eden is a strange, warped melodrama in which Cal has to be "right," and more deserving than anyone else. *Streetcar* is less of a play the more Stanley is allowed to dominate. To rephrase Jean Renoir (in *La règle du jeu*), we like to see that everyone has his or her own reality now—ensemble acting seems a way of life. But being "right"—having Cal's need made triumphant—is actually a disservice to life's complexity. Acting will recover, though James Lipton may stretch the Method's funeral out for some more years. We have some actors now who, even if they were once a part of the Method, are more open to pretense: Malkovich, Spacey, Day-Lewis, Macy, Tommy Lee Jones, Jeff Bridges. They have their tradition, and it once included Cary Grant, Astaire, William Powell, Olivier, Robert Mitchum, Anthony Perkins (in *Psycho*), Robert Walker (in *Strangers on a Train*), Brando, Clift—actors who flirted with the brink of authenticity, like tightrope walkers. It was closer to "gay" acting than to manly self-revelation. But America may at last be advancing beyond parables where men find their inner selves.

Kazan was a man of his moment and his moment was the 1950s, when he made himself a character in America as vivid, as omnivorous and as desperate to be loved as Norman Mailer, Sugar Ray Robinson, or Lucille Ball. *Kazan on Directing* adds too little to what we know, but the first half of the book is golden and no would-be director or actor will read it without benefit. But if you want the real man—untidy, but so alive; candid, yet so devious that he did not hear himself; addicted to honesty, but driven to betray associates; sold on true feeling, but never trusting it—you have to go back to *A Life*. There is a great play to be written about Elia Kazan, a monster of self-deluding sincerity, but the gadget in his dreams of glory. ◆

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Washington Diarist

Contrary Chances

"The thing I fear most is fear." This was Montaigne, in an early essay, many centuries before Roosevelt. "It exceeds all other disorders in intensity." He was endorsing an ancient fear of fear, according to which it is a disgrace, and the most formidable enemy of reason, and therefore an impediment to self-control, and to thoughtful action. The mastery of fear, in this tradition, is one of the signs of the attainment of wisdom. I am being a little bookish, but I heard echoes of this delegitimation of fear in Barack Obama's speech on national security at the National Archives. He always referred to fear derisively—"all too often our government made decisions based on fear rather than foresight"; "we will be ill-served by … fear-mongering" and by words that "are calculated to scare people rather than educate them," and so on. He warned against "fodder for 30-second commercials" and "direct mail pieces … designed to frighten the population." It did not hurt Obama's argument that even as he was rising above alarmism Cheney was making a commercial for it across town. In the disputation between Vice-President Dracula and President van Helsing, the choice seemed easy. A little too easy, actually. So I would like to say a few words on behalf of fear, before our national security policy settles into a misplaced stoicism.

There are two ways in which one can alter one's experience of the world. One can change the world, or one can change one's attitude toward the world. But the world will not be altered by a change in our attitude toward it; or more precisely, only that part of it will be altered that is determined by our attitude toward it. This leaves a great deal of analytical work to be done. We can control our beliefs and our actions. But which of our circumstances are caused by our beliefs and our actions, and which by the beliefs and the actions of other people, who are just as autonomous, and just as animated by their own reasons, as we are? We must not mistake a mastery of ourselves for a mastery of the world. Self-control is control only of the self; and for this reason it is often a mild withdrawal, an elegant form of detachment from whatever escapes our power but causes us pain. The problem is that the protection of oneself is not yet the protection of others. Fear is often a social unease. If societies cannot run on panic, neither can they run on calm. For even if we extirpate from our minds all of fear's infirmities, we will still discover that some of what frightens us has a cognitive basis, that certain dangers are incontrovertibly real. Is fear sometimes stupid? Then fearlessness is sometimes stupid, too. The question is when. But calm may be the most cunning kind of demagoguery, because it looks so much like the opposite.

These judgments are infamously difficult to make. Where we need the most certainty, we have the least certainty. Instead we operate in the emotionally volatile universe of probability. "Probability arises from an opposition of contrary chances or causes," Hume observed, "by which the mind is not allow'd to fix on either side, but is incessantly tost from one to another, and at one moment is determin'd to consider an object as existent, and at another moment as the contrary." He was writing about fear and hope, and it is a fine depiction of the way we think now. In matters of national safety, I do not see how we can proceed responsibly without a respect for fear. The imagination of disaster is an intellectual condition for homeland security. Fear, too, may be a variety of foresight. If a candid account of our vulnerabilities is a way of scaring the American people, then to scare them is also to educate them—or, in the current parlance of Obama love, to treat them like adults. (In other realms of risk—health, product safety, climate change—many liberals tolerate alarmism as just a lurid form of prudence.) Like all prejudice, which is never an empirical conclusion and so cannot be explained by reference to its object, anti-Americanism cannot be explained entirely by reference to America, even to Bush's America: we have turned our new page in our relations with the world, but in Pakistan they are burning effigies of the president whose middle name is Hussein. Have we exchanged Bush's surfeit of confidence for Obama's surfeit of confidence? In this hour of progress, a sense of plasticity should be complicated by a sense of facticity. In an endlessly stimulating book called *Laws of Fear*, Cass Sunstein unhysterically proposes what he calls "the Anti-Catastrophe Principle." He means this as a supplement to all the sophistication that is required of governmental action about risk; as a concept with which we may arm ourselves against worst-case scenarios for which we cannot be adequately consoled by considerations of improbability. Sunstein prefers "technocrats" to "populists," and champions the correction of feeling by study—and yet he insists that there may be dire eventualities that justify aggressive measures for the purpose of prevention, and that this principle "has a definite place in both life and law." Ponder the applications to our security of his deceptively simple prescription: "If public fear cannot be alleviated without risk reduction, then government reasonably engages in risk reduction."

It is cruel to shame people for their fears, because their fears are measures of their attachments. A life with nothing to lose is a serene and hollow life. (Worry, as my mother once said to me, shows an interest.) And political leadership is in part the art of preparing people for struggle. The scanting of fear is not a foundation for a summons to courage. The peculiar thing about Obama's discourses on national security is that they do not speak of courage. In this way he is unlike Roosevelt, whose "fear itself" speech was premised upon the recognition of fear—of warranted fear—but warned of its inhibiting effects, and then ascended to an appreciation of "warm courage." Obama does not call on us to be brave; he calls on us to be good, and to be cool. When he declares that "our values have been our best national security asset," I do not know quite what he means. He promises a pristinity that the fight may not allow. If our means should not be mistaken for our ends, neither should our ends be mistaken for our means. Our values are not what protect us, they are what we protect—not by traducing them, obviously, but also not by losing ourselves in the adoration of their beauty. Our values are why we were attacked. And so there is moral truth in a cold sweat, and civic dignity in a sleepless night.

Leon Wieseltier

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